Modern English and American Poetry

TECHNIQUES AND IDEOLOGIES

This study of contemporary English and American poetry was undertaken with a twofold purpose: to provide the general reader with critical tools for the penetration of that obscurity both of expression and of content encountered so often in modern verse; and to illuminate for those specially interested in technique the underlying problems of sound and rhythm.

Professor Schlauch's approach to her subject is informed by an awareness of the social responsibility of literature, of the poet's obligation to seek and to affirm positive values for our society and in so doing to maintain the great traditions of English poetry. The principles of analysis expounded in the first part of this work are not restricted in application to the verse of our own time, but are a contribution to the study of poetics in general, in that they deal with the use of imagery, symbols, and other devices of language as well as with verse forms and the structure of the poem as a whole. This wider relevance is also shared by the second part of the book, which, in exploring the relation between the sound effects of verse and the acoustics of language, brings into the area of general discussion material hitherto reserved for specialist journals. The work is supplemented by a glossary of terms and by an introductory bibliography.

Professor Schlauch, whose published work includes *The Gift of Tongues*, now occupies the chair of English Philology at the University of Warsaw.

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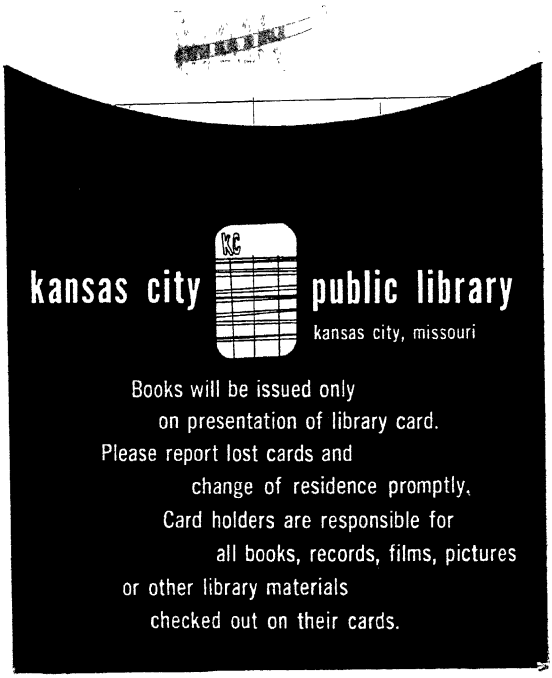
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MODERN ENGLISH AND AMERICAN POETRY

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TECHNIQUES AND IDEOLOGIES

MARGARET SCHLAUCH

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PREFACE

THE purpose of this book is twofold.

In the first place, it attempts to indicate to general readers how they may surmount the chief apparent difficulties in reading contemporary verse, so that they can get to the heart of what poets are saying and make their own judgments about the sense. Many of the difficulties are, indeed, more apparent than real. One of the traits of formalism today is that it parades various tricks and devices that, with a small amount of patience, can be shown to be quite transparent. It is time that readers were assured, with demonstrations, how little they need to be awe-struck by the pretensions of our more elaborate versifiers. How to read, analyse, and master the expression and content of contemporary poetry is explained in Part I, and this exposition leads to the formulation of critical methods and final judgments: the evaluation of ideology as well as style.

In the second place, the author has tried to give, for those more specially interested in techniques, a fresh approach to the underlying problems of sound and rhythm. The materials on this subject may be regarded from the point of view of the general reader as an appendix which he may take or not, as he likes. It is recommended, however, that he take it. Here too there are no impenetrable mysteries. An elementary craftsman's knowledge of poetry can be acquired with less strain and hocus-pocus than certain of the professionals would have us suppose. Meantime, the general reader of Part I will be helped by the glossary of special terms, placed at the end, to which he can refer as he proceeds. They have been added in an appendix in order to avoid interrupting Part I with detailed discussion and definitions, which are more fully given in Part II.

The general criticism of modern poetry is presented here from the point of view of the social responsibility of literature, a problem which is historically sketched in the first chapter. Upon examination of the ideological content of modern English and American poetry, it appears that a certain part of it—no matter how challenging

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and ingenious from the technical point of view—is to be condemned because of unworthy or even degrading substance. Unlike most of the best English poetry produced in the past, much of this verse fails to capture the positive values which caused the earlier creations to be enduringly cherished by humanity. Themes alone are not the issue. Negative and abhorrent themes have been treated in many past ages, in literature which we still call great. It is the way of conceiving these themes which has degenerated, as I see it, in much Western writing in general, and in English and American literature in particular. I am convinced, as I have tried to indicate in the first and fifth chapters, that the decline and even degeneracy too often apparent in today's poetic art is connected with a change in the poets' social position, and in the state of the society to which most conventional poets of the West, consciously or not, pay their allegiance. And the healthier poets now are those who struggle against the injustices of that society, one way or another.

The aesthetic problems here treated are not limited, however, to our own age. Lovers of poetry are invited to discover for themselves how the principles of analysis suggested in this book can enrich their understanding of English verse in previous historical periods. Those principles have a wide application, as a matter of fact, outside of the contemporary field to which they are here related. The present analysis may thus have a certain value as a layman's handbook of poetics in general, and perhaps offer some guidance to those now beginning to experiment with the writing of verse who have not been able to obtain the benefits of a formal academic education.

In Part II, which embodies the more technical information, I have attempted to supplement familiar information with new knowledge. Besides a brief review of traditional scansion (which is still useful to us today), I have given a simple exposition of the material basis of poetic art. That is, I have considered the physical (acoustic) elements in language which may be exploited for the purpose of art. So far as I know, this is the first general discussion, not counting those in scholarly journals and monographs, that draws on physical science to show how sound effects in verse are related to the acoustics of language. Older handbooks of poetics have occasionally made vague, inadequately supported judgments (often quite subjective ones) about the aural effects of verse, but the analysis of speech sounds for this purpose has hitherto been insufficient. The recent reports on

spectrograph analysis of speech sounds made in the Bell Laboratories throw considerable light on the problems discussed in this section.

There are signs that new modes and aims are beginning to engage the attention of young poets. Not all the moderns, by any means, are decadent and formalist. There are many who aspire to the creative use of distinguished technique in the service of a positive ideology, following the best tradition of English poetry. There will be more of them, I am sure, as the new society struggling to be born helps them to re-conquer their former positions of honour in the community.

At the same time it is to be expected that the young poets already writing under a socialist inspiration will for their part surmount certain tendencies towards the use of stereotypes, towards over-great reliance on an accepted mode, which have perceptibly hampered the development of the less original spirits among them. Of such it may be said that they already possess attitudes of generous poetic affirmation, but they have too often neglected the study of technique.

The understanding of affirmative, truly creative poetry, present and future, will continue to enrich the lives of new generations of readers and listeners in the future. The mastery of such understanding will, it is to be hoped, be assisted by the explanations offered in this manual.

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PART ONE

General

CHAPTER I

POETS AND AUDIENCES

In the English-speaking world, the statement is often made that poetry has fallen on evil times. From many quarters the lament is raised: practitioners of the poetic art, together with their admirers, tell us that their number has dwindled to the tiniest fraction of the English-speaking population, while devotees of cruder entertainment flourish by the millions. The allurements of sensational fiction, debased motion pictures, and comic strips have ensnared a huge section of the adult literate public in America, and also to a deplorable extent in the British Commonwealth and colonies. The writer of serious English verse begins with the assumption, therefore, that his audience will be restricted to a very few readers. A typical 'slim' choice volume of such writing in the United States is said to do very well if it sells 500 copies, and the author himself is almost always expected to pay for the costs of printing it, out of his own pocket—or a patron's. What boots it indeed, a modern follower of Milton may well inquire,

> with incessant care
> To tend the homely, slighted shepherd's trade
> And strictly meditate the thankless Muse?

when the products of such meditation are foredoomed to still birth? Certainly there is little inducement in the form of wide popular recognition or tangible rewards. So the poet is led to withdraw into himself, and to concern himself with the approval of himself alone, or at most with that of a very small group of fellow initiates. 'If my fellow-citizens won't have me,' he may say to himself, 'I shall not address myself to them. We who

belong to the cult of poetry—its creators and its critics—are made of finer stuff than the outsiders, in any event. We have no need of them.'

Thus contempt is engendered in the poet for the English-speaking public at large.

The poet's fellow citizens have a complaint of their own, however. Many among them were not by nature insensitive to the appeal of the arts. Many have drifted gradually towards the lower forms of entertainment furnished by modern society under capitalism, because they were discouraged when they tried to cultivate the higher. Such persons are likely to have been convinced, when they were at school, that the poetry of an earlier period at least, and some of today's also, could say something to them. The flame of appreciation may have been kindled by teachers, and strengthened by adolescent experiments in original verse-writing; it may have been nurtured into incipient aesthetic pleasure and deepened with critical understanding during sixth-form studies. Or it may have sprung from adventurous reading on the part of eagerly curious, if unguided, lay readers. These may have got so far, let us say, that they can respond to the major Elizabethans, savour the Cavalier lyricists, yield to the compulsion of Milton's power, and derive some pleasure from the Romantics and the Victorians. Some may have been prompted by their enthusiasm to memorize a few lyrics, and such persons may desire and intend to pursue the reading of poetry, especially lyric poetry, as a form of higher relaxation all their lives. In this spirit they turn in due course to the moderns, their own contemporaries, hoping to find an emotional experience the more immediate and satisfying because it is expressed in the idiom of their own day, and may be expected to deal with themes appropriate to the times.

But they are quite frequently disappointed. It is not always the competition of vulgar amusements that explains the failure of modern poetry to reach potential readers. The cheap and corrupting 'cultural' wares offered by advanced monopolistic capitalism to the public explain much, but not all, of the present

crisis in literature—specifically, in poetry. The literary cultists also contribute to the frustrations of their own art. To understand the role played by them it is necessary to understand the present state of English poetry.

Despite the handicaps to culture in the English-speaking world, a potential audience still exists for poetry today. Typical members of the group include persons with some formal training or the equivalent experience gained in politics, self-education, or social activity: professional people, trade unionists, working-class militants, civil servants, housewives who are active in community affairs, and so on. Among such people in England and America, many have developed or retained from earlier years an intellectual curiosity embracing literature in general and poetry in particular; they are resolved to 'keep up with things' despite all pressure from an environment prevailingly hostile to culture. They read books, they attend lectures, they seek out superior plays and films, and—here is where the problem arises—they buy an occasional volume of verse by living poets.

The other activities mentioned are likely to bring an immediate and unquestioned reward. But not so poetry. The instructed but non-professional reader finds that he does not share with the authors the idiom in which he is addressed. Lacking a classical education, he may be baffled by the Latin tags interspersed in a poem by Wallace Stevens; [1] or by all sorts of indirect allusions and elliptical descriptions, as in this poem by Herbert Read entitled 'Lepidoptera':

> These pink chrysalid faces,
> Devoid of anything so atavistic as whiskers,
> Flame evenly beneath felt hats—
> Abash'd torches in the daylight.
>
> Intent on solemn inanities,
> They maintain a torpid demeanour
>
> Until night finally falls,
> When, stript of their drab or tinsel sheaths,
> They ape Narcissus in mildewed mirrors,

Display their graces to the sick glare of gas-jets,
And on rococo quilts
Get corybantic for a while.[2]

Or he may find that expectations aroused by a title are soon betrayed by the poem itself, which appears to have no connection with it. A poem like Jean Garrigue's 'Marriage is a Mystery of Joy' leads him to suppose that the subject is an epithalamium; instead, he finds himself involved in an unclear disquisition on recollected imagery in relation to mind and body:

Old images best the scoundrel eye:
Adornment for the ceremonial bride
Whose joy was consecrated by the torch. . . .
That banquet glows upon the startled eye:
It'd seem the image is enough, enough
Its seizure cold and rude as death.[3]

After such trials and experiences, it may be quite well understood if the earnest, puzzled reader abandons his efforts. Feeling cheated, he will turn to less arduous recreations. The memory of enjoyed poetry fades. As the strains of living increase upon him in a period of continuous crises, he may even forget that he once thought he enjoyed it.

If this is what happens to the moderately trained reader in the 'western' world, we can readily imagine what amazed incomprehension, even anger, would be aroused in one without any training, if he came across these effusions. He might be justified in supposing that someone was trying to 'pull his leg'. For most members of the public, whose literacy takes them little further than the daily press and light fiction, such writing might as well be in Greek or Chiwawa, for all they might be expected to get out of it.

And the poets? They have lost their audience, in the broad sense of the term. Their very names are unknown to the vast majority of their compatriots. The abyss between them and the men and women around them is wider and deeper now than it has ever been in the history of the English language, and most of

the professional poets are doing nothing to bridge it. This is the most striking single fact about English poetry today. On the one side there is—with some honourable exceptions, of course—an aloof and esoteric indifference; on the other side, ignorant or impatient indifference. Communication is at a minimum. The situation is not favourable to the development of vigorous and widely cultivated poetic writing.

The history of English literature makes it clear that such a situation has not always existed; it is, in fact, a quite recent development. Isolation was far from being the mark of the poetic craft in past ages. Quite the contrary. To see just how great has been the change in the poet's status, it will be well to glance briefly at the social history of this profession. In early times, as today among peoples organized in still relatively primitive forms of social living—clans, tribes, remote villages—the poet has been close to his people and he has also been in the centre of events. The connection of these two aspects of his life is important. Moreover, he has typically delivered his literary product directly, so to speak: from voice to ear, not from dead letters to the eye. The truism cannot be too often stressed that poetry is based on spoken rhythms and sound-patterns. In the hall of the early clan chieftain or petty king, in the agora of a Greek city-state, in the oriental bazaar, the market-place, the mediaeval castle, the work centres of pre-literate men—everywhere the poet delivered his creation immediately, by pulsing waves of air, to the listeners' receptive ears, not mediately on pages to be read. He might have had apprentices or successors to memorize and re-deliver his compositions for him, but that did not affect the basic relationship between himself and his public.

The mode of transmission helped to shape the technical devices used. The strumming of a musical instrument as an accompaniment often pinned down the patterned sequences of formal verse. And—this too is important—the poet owned and controlled his instruments of communication. When accompaniment was lost or lacking, verse delivery still remained

stylized—exaggerated, according to the standards of modern silent readers—and thus marked off very sharply from prose discourse. The sing-song mode, the gestures, the calculated pauses of more primitive reciters were part of their professional equipment, differing from the simple, rather straightforward manner we affect in reciting today. But we can surmise the contrasting habits in past days of pre-literacy or restricted literacy from classical accounts and the internal evidence of mediaeval literature, besides the study of analogous situations among contemporary primitive peoples and English-speaking communities that have retained archaic traditions in various parts of the world.

There was a practical usefulness in the devices that, from time immemorial, distinguished poetic speech from ordinary diction. Any metrical composition is by its nature easier to memorize than prose, quite aside from its aesthetic appeal. The advantage of scanned feet, of metrical lines and stanzas, can be readily understood in relation to the professional needs of pre-literary reciters of verse. In addition, rhyme-schemes stand out as a patterned aid to verbal recall. Other devices of sound-echo serve the same purpose. Assonance, or the repetition of vowel sounds regardless of neighbouring consonants, has been used by some schools of oral poetry instead of rhyme. Thus, when the feudal French poets of the twelfth century were reciting (or better, chanting) the epics about Charlemagne and his peers in aristocratic households, they used blocks of lines tied together by identical final vowels, much as if we were to have a set of lines ending in words like *pin, fit, rig, sling*. The groups ran in length from about ten lines to twenty or thirty and even more. The echoing of sounds had mnemonic value.

Initial sounds could also be used by poets relying on memory rather than on written sources. Having two or more words within a given line begin with the same consonant sound—the device called alliteration—would help to fix the words in that line at least, the more so if the like sounds were regularly related to the system of accented syllables. This was done by the early

Anglo-Saxon poets in England. Professional reciters delivering the work of earlier poets could thus be expected to give accurate reproduction of verse units so constructed. Devices of stress, of regular pauses, musical beat, repeated words, refrains, and so on contributed further to the accurate preservation of unwritten texts. (It has been suggested that magic and religious practices had something to do with the choice of alliteration among early Germanic poets. This may have been an additional factor in developing the usage, but the poetical advantages were present none the less.)

Whether or not the reciters of verse were also the men who composed it, the conditions for delivering it favoured the development of special acoustic patterns, sometimes quite elaborate ones, for preservation as well as adornment. Usefulness was a consideration as well as beauty. And audiences were still, as the word indicates, groups of listeners.

The conditions for composing were still decisive of content too, in clear and obvious ways. Like Aeneas, the poets of earlier cultures could often boast that they had themselves vigorously participated in the kind of action they described. Celtic bards, Anglo-Saxon scops, Scandinavian skalds, and Slavic poets were usually warriors too. Their social position was among the fighters permanently attached to a chief or small king, as distinct from the land-owing peasants who normally tilled the fields and tended the cattle, taking up arms only transiently in time of need. The latter group was itself not far removed from the simple courts, and its members participated in the general heritage besides producing verse of their own: charms, incantations, proverbs, and the like. Some of them might even shift into the class of poet-fighters, and occasionally contribute an epic fictional personage glorifying the mighty peasant toiler as a tribal champion. This happened with the legendary Slavic peasant-warrior Mikula, hero of the Russian *byliny* or popular epics. But the professional fighters, the aristocracy of the tribe, normally produced and listened to the epic narratives we associate with their social milieu.

Many occasions lent themselves to celebration by verse performance. A victory, a funeral feast, a welcome to an honoured stranger would invite a rehearsal of past exploits in forms readily reproduced from memory. Sometimes a talented visitor from another tribe, speaking a variant dialect, might be expected to greet his host with a eulogistic poem. The literary form might vary from the straight recounting of praiseworthy exploits to allusive catalogues of them; from objective narrative to subjective recall. The reward was prompt and tangible, if the chieftains were pleased. We learn that rich cloaks and gold-adorned armour were bestowed upon poets who won success.

Even more: the chieftain was often eagerly solicitous or placating towards attendant and visiting poets. For these men were, in Hamlet's phrase about the players of a later era, 'the abstract and brief chronicles of the time'; it was true that 'after your death you were better have a bad epitaph than their ill report while you live'. Concerning such poets among the early Germanic peoples we possess quite detailed and reliable knowledge, and also considerable information about those in Celtic and Slavic cultures on comparable levels of development. All sources testify to the personal esteem, even affectionate devotion on a basis of near equality, existing between poets and overlords, and transcending merely literary and social stereotypes. The Anglo-Saxon lyrical poems like 'The Wanderer' and 'The Seafarer' are late reflections of this attitude of human intimacy. The reason for it was that pre-feudal society did not separate the skalds or bards from their chiefs by wide class distinctions when the relationship between them was otherwise friendly.

When it was not, the poet had the power—again, as Hamlet said of the players—to damn a chief's reputation in life and in death, as a reprisal for what he conceived to be ill treatment. Whether justly or not, Ermanaric the Goth, fabled Germanic king of the fourth century A.D., was reported to have been ungenerous and mean, cowardly towards his foes, and treacherous to his kin. He was so labelled throughout the entire Germanic world for many centuries. No later ruler, listening to the poets'

judgments on Ermanaric's 'wolfish mind', could fail to understand the implication: 'Look to your behaviour also, especially towards us, the poets, or the same may be said about you!' Thus poets were in a sense mentors and preceptors of kings in matters of duty and responsibility. Certainly they were a vital and socially responsible element in their respective cultures.

This is no mere surmise. Texts as different as the Old English *Beowulf*, the earliest French epics of Charlemagne, and the verses of Icelandic skalds visiting Norwegian courts, contain warnings, political admonitions, and even reproaches marked by startling bluntness, directed towards rulers. Historical records of life in England before A.D. 1066 confirm the impression given by the literature concerning the poet's position as one commanding high social esteem.

When feudalism, increasingly complex and stratified in its social structure, followed upon the earlier forms of exploitation, land-ownership, and military service, the poet's status was modified. Whether as troubadour singing the new-fashioned love lyrics of Provence, or as trouvère spinning out endless metrical romances about Arthurian knights, the maker of verses found himself the entertainer in a new kind of enlarged household, dwelling in a fortress-like castle, consorting with barons and knights-at-arms who had often engaged in ambitious, far-distant campaigns. The world view was broader from the twelfth century onwards, the separation of aristocracy from peasantry was greater, the social strata within local courts were more deeply differentiated, but the interests of poet and audience were still closely akin. In fact, mediaeval courtly poets were themselves often knights skilled in arms, or clerics from the same families. They too participated in the affairs of their patrons, experienced the wars and Crusades and pilgrimages and adventures that were transmuted—with liberal additions of fantasy—into material for their fictitious tales. The extant poetry of earlier feudalism is typically the product of such men. We have little knowledge about popular oral poetry centred on the lives of ordinary village folk of the same period, however,

because of the paucity of written material. Nevertheless we know that it existed.

Towards the end of the Middle Ages, a contrast emerges between the courtly aristocratic literature and a more popular type cultivated not only in the villages but also in the marketplaces of the rising commercial towns. Popular ballads like those of England, Scotland, and the Scandinavian countries recounted simple stories of love, feuds, and death, slightly resembling fairy tales, and slightly recalling the themes of courtly romance (but much simplified). Humorous, even ribald, themes, sprung more realistically from daily life, relieved the sentimental ones. There was a certain amount of satire and social complaint. An undercurrent of rebellion against the ruling classes was sometimes expressed, as in the English Robin Hood ballads and in the Swedish fifteenth-century ballads about Engelbrekt; the same feelings were sometimes masked behind the tale of sorrow for a village maiden loved and abandoned by an overlord. The English Revolt of 1381 produced revolutionary verse and song, of which but a few scraps have survived. In the same period, artisans began to create a verse literature of their own in religious plays and farces performed by the guilds, being set down by nameless writers closer to the people's needs and hopes than were the knightly singers of the castles. By the end of the Middle Ages, the surviving examples of non-aristocratic poetry are relatively plentiful.

The invention of printing broadened the diversity of audience and thematic material that have already become apparent in the first half of the fifteenth century. The non-aristocratic voices were multiplied; some non-aristocratic singers learned from aristocratic models and tried (often mechanically) to imitate their florid manner. The bustling towns of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, where trade most flourished, produced poets with a new class background. Burghers of the Netherlands, for instance, instituted 'Chambers of Rhetoric' before which effusions of stilted verse were delivered according to rule: artificial and uninspired, they reflected chiefly the zeal of a new class to

'catch up' culturally with its predecessors. The estimable Master-Singers of Nuremburg, led by the prolific Hans Sachs, showed the same enthusiasm in adapting older mediaeval scenes to new audiences, but they had not yet found the manner of accomplishing this entirely successfully, as the sixteenth-century dramatists did in England. For writers in the transition period, however, the problem of sponsorship was already solved in advance. A guild or syndicate served at once as patron and audience. In London, guilds sometimes commissioned the composition of poems to celebrate special festive occasions. A poet like Lydgate is known to have executed such commissions in the fifteenth century.

Patronage of some sort was still necessary for the arts, and it was still available. In some cities the community as a whole fostered literature along with the other arts. Renaissance aristocrats and merchant princes, enriched by new trade, new colonies, new lands (derived both from conquests and secularized church properties) shared also in the upsurging vitality of the times. Many in England, as elsewhere, were themselves men of letters and were both pleased and flattered to give assistance to dependent poets in return for admiring dedications in the volumes published. Printing, the great invention of the fifteenth century, was relatively costly; prohibitively so for a humble poet without inherited income if he wished to do something ambitious. 'Polite' letters therefore gravitated towards wealthy aristocratic patronage. The less 'polite' forms were found in cheap tracts and folk-books (German *volksbücher*), and broadside sheets of doggerel verse reporting current events and scandals: political crises, murders, natural calamities, monstrous births, apparitions. Most of these, while sociologically interesting, were worthless as art, but occasionally a fine ballad was recorded on fugitive sheets of paper. And the short popular tracts on social, religious, educational, and political issues sometimes achieved true eloquence. The English poem 'God Speed the Plough', and others like it, which reflected the miseries of a peasantry in crisis, were among those thus circulated. Excellent

examples in prose appeared in England during the seventeenth-century revolution, when the power of the aristocratic patronage was temporarily broken.

Matter designed for permanence was enclosed in more durable and expensive bindings, which put it beyond the reach of the masses as a whole. The craft of printing had indeed multiplied these volumes greatly in comparison with mediaeval manuscripts, so that the ruling classes were now far more literate than they had been since the fall of Rome. But in accomplishing this, printing had tended to make reading a silent pleasure. In this form, and directed mostly to a favoured minority, poetry was now enabled to develop intricacies not very often cultivated in the days of oral transmission. Study of the text on a printed page could be leisurely; there was time for it, whereas the swift tongues of the tribal declaimers did not so greatly favour reflection on what was being spoken. Tudor, Elizabethan, and Stuart readers with libraries were gentlemen of similar education, who had thoroughly immersed themselves in classical literature. They were equipped to enjoy mythological and historical allusions, even recondite ones. They could pursue an elaborate image or a comparison through the obliquest allusions made to Ovidian nymphs or Homeric heroes or the worthies of ancient history. Many wealthy amateurs themselves wrote such verse. The poets they aided or protected shared their poetic idiom with them. And if we can judge from the drama, that idiom reached amazingly wide circles of the general population.

Thus patronage continued in a new form, using the new channels of communication. In the eighteenth century, as is well known, some protest arose against it. One thinks of the stalwart Dr. Samuel Johnson's magnificent letter to the Earl of Chesterfield as symptomatic of a growing restlessness. The social forces driving towards the French Revolution were at the same time undermining the system of patronage by an hereditary aristocracy. A market was found for middle-class prose literature, which required no such patronage. Yet the dedicatory epistles accompanying poems, addressed to noble lords and serene high-

nesses and royal protectors, became more verbose, more abject than ever, especially on the Continent—until after 1789 many of the former lofty patrons suddenly found themselves without lands, resources, or any means to cultivate the adulation of dependent poets.

After the political upheavals following upon the French Revolution, a second and still more profound transformation affected poets in the practice of their craft. This was the emergence of machine-driven industry, followed by mass production of commodities, including literary commodities. Books, journals, newspapers—the various products of printing—were delivered to the market in quantities undreamt of by Caxton, and were read by a much augmented public. In the place of the chosen, restricted audience of a former day, reached through a patron's help, poets now faced a vast anonymous crowd—a 'mob', as it appeared to many of them—through the agency of impersonal publishers. The latter now had to be placated, and it became necessary to prove that the literary product, like any other commodity, would bring a commercial profit to the owner of a publishing enterprise. Some poets welcomed the opportunity to reach wider audiences. In the more advanced countries, romantic lyricists like Shelley hailed the chance to address their fellowmen in greater numbers, and celebrated the dawn of a new era promising liberty, a rational society, and greater equality for all mankind, with the final elimination of feudal restraints. In their enthusiasm, most of them did not inquire too strictly into the economic system alleged to bring this about. Few poets realized that the changes in the relations of production had also affected them as producers. Just as the working people were being separated from ownership of the tools of production, and being transformed into a modern proletariat, so the poets were being pushed further away from the channels of communication with their public.

Their jubilation about the blessings of mass-produced print was soon shown to be premature. Left romantics like Victor Hugo and Shelley had reckoned without the possibility that

modern printing presses, owned by companies and individual entrepreneurs, might in many cases be deliberately used to stultify, cheapen, and divert the popular taste in literature. Yet as the nineteenth century advanced, capitalist mass production in the printed word was clearly doing just that. The commodity market in general was flooded with cheap and tawdry wares; and the literary market with dishonest and sentimental ones. They inundated family magazines, local papers, and also larger journals. Through bulk alone, the vile and the standardized eventually drove the superior into a limited area. 'Good' writers, including poets, became a more restricted set. Still relatively popular in a broad sense during the Victorian era, they lost ground in the twentieth century as sensational journalism increased its blighting influence. By then, the poets had completely lost the favoured status of olden times; their patrons had disappeared as a class, despite the persistence of individual Maecenases and the official recognition given to conforming 'laureates'; the channels of expression and the tools of communication were no longer at their disposal, and they found themselves alienated and hostile in a society that had set them apart.

The reaction of poets to their new status under capitalism was not everywhere and at all periods the same. The flames of revolutionary upsurge, in 1848 and again (more particularly in France) in 1870, cast a revealing light on the nature of social relations, and many poets responded to the vision, if only temporarily and waveringly. To some extent they were instructed during these periods in the causes of their own disinherited status, as with particular understanding they watched the mass of the disinherited European proletariat challenging the very citadel of oppression under the new economic system. The flashes of perception by English poets—Swinburne, for instance —were brief and inconclusive; the majority of them fell into the prevailing Victorian mood of acceptance and social complacency. The well-intentioned and generous-spirited William Morris saw more clearly than most English writers what was happening to their art under capitalism, but his own poetic gifts fell short of

the challenge to respond with corrective vigour, in protest and constructive example. Resistance to the facile optimism of the ruling classes was indeed expressed in poetry, often in forms and themes that ostensibly had nothing to do with the immediate social milieu, but that were nevertheless connected with it and with the poets' sense of social malaise. The cosmic pessimism of a Thomas Hardy and the personal revulsions of a George Meredith may at first glance seem to have nothing to do with the matter, but a profound correlation may be sensed between their artistic-philosophic attitudes on the one hand and their awareness (unclear though it may be) of social status on the other. A great poet like Baudelaire could infuse his verses with a vast power of social condemnation, even while writing of themes ostensibly subjective and personal. Disharmonies in the self and in the environment are made simultaneously significant in his orchestral verse. But minor poets with a blind sense of pettier grievance failed to register more than the most trivial and puerile defiance. They were ostracised, they felt, from an old status of advantage and esteem, but they did not see why and they did not know what to do about it. They took refuge, therefore, in eccentricity.

Hence the truculence of the professional aesthetes, the near-creators among the literati, in the latter nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Hence the defiance, the Bohemianism, the affectations, of the self-conscious and self-labelled superior artists. Writers often felt intuitively (though they did not always express this lucidly) that the bourgeois was to blame: that hard, money-grubbing, factory-owning, labour-sweating type satirized by Balzac, Dickens, Zola, and many others. When the resentment was blind, it found expression in a cheap flouting of conventional mores. To *épater le bourgeois* by its behaviour was the most constructive gesture Bohemia would make, and it was at best futile. The bourgeois went his way, for the most part happily oblivious.

And the poet, on his side, often found a perverse satisfaction in the alienation he had suffered from his tools and his historic

craft. To starve in an attic became proof of being a chosen spirit. To write incomprehensible verses was another mark of superiority: an act of defiance towards the smug philistine who might try to read them. The attitude has persisted to our own times. Literary critics have encouraged it. The contemporary critic I. A. Richards has recently assured us that the poet does not usually regard himself as a communicater: 'In the course of his work he is not as a rule deliberately and consciously engaged in a communicative endeavour. . . . He cannot stop to consider how the public or even how especially well qualified sections of the public may like it or respond to it. He is wise, therefore, to keep all such considerations out of mind altogether. These artists and poets who can be suspected of close separate attention to the communicative aspect tend . . . to fall into a subordinate rank.' [4] Comments of this sort could be multiplied indefinitely, and they illuminate the new modern attitude towards the social role of poetry.

Meantime, modern artists in verse have for the greater part shown little concern with the un-selfconscious, unsophisticated, and unmannered writers who have continued to produce verse —much of it bad, but some of it amazingly good—out of the people's direct experience: voices heard in the mines and factories of England and the United States, on the farm fields, and out of the slave-worked plantations of nineteenth-century America. After a flurry of interest in folk poetry on the part of the romantics, attention was directed elsewhere. Poets laureate (the officially approved) and poets Bohemian (the stridently different) were alike remote from these. Even historians of literature paid little serious attention to fugitive popular poetry until very recent times.

The division between popular and literary expression persists, on the whole, to this day, though less rigidly now than previously. The latter is still dominated by attitudes of aloofness and cultism. The fashion set by precious or defiant or decadent writers in the eighteen-nineties can be observed in the latest English and American collections of verse. The forces tending

to cheapen public taste have also gained gigantic powers. The sensational daily press, radio and television, the journals of fashion, of predigested opinion, and of stereotyped fiction have all become functioning parts of a vast system calculated to stifle art by corrupting its potential audience. Portrayals of violence for its own sake constitute an increasing proportion of the output of prose, and readers already exhausted by hard work and previous sensationalism have been taught to depend on them as a substitute for true aesthetic experience. These are not the readers to whom are directed the works of professional poets. Whatever contemporary verse does reach them—in songs, on Christmas cards, in local newspapers—is doggerel in rhythms, sentimental in outlook, curiously Victorian in mannerisms. It is not so much violent as sentimental and false. It is the subject of contemptuous sneers, aesthetically justified but sociologically imperceptive, whenever its existence is even passingly noticed by the self-conscious professional poets. The latter seldom ask themselves why the masses of people are forced to be content with such cheap wares.

However, not all poets, now or in the nineteenth century, have been guilty of an attitude of contemptuous disdain towards all popular verse and versifiers. A more sympathetic interest has always been present among some writers, and it has become more general in the last decades. Its influence can be detected in some contemporary creative writing. There has also been a revolt among certain literary critics against the cult of unintelligibility and against formalist excesses in elaborate technique. The English and American critics of formalism, notably among the Left schools of literary criticism, advise a humbler, more appreciative consideration of the people's media of expression—where these have not been corrupted in a planned way—in ballad and sentimental ditty and popular epic. Students and serious readers are investigating our inheritance of folk-lore in verse, including Negro spirituals and work songs, with excellent results.

All this is very desirable. But there is a danger here too. In a

revulsion against formalism we may find ourselves in danger of uncritically glorifying the simple merely because it is simple. A reaction against extremely cerebral and 'precious' works may lead to excesses of another sort: the monotonous treatment of emotional subjects on an elementary level. After all, there are times when complexity is in order; when a surge of contradictory emotions may clamour for complex treatment befitting the disparity of feelings. Such pressure justifies choice of an intricate style. A simple one would be inappropriate. Later, when contradictions are resolved, a magnificent clarity may emerge from the turmoil, and then simplicity is achieved on a higher level. Shakespeare is full of such contrasts and transformations. He uses the inflated, rhetorically complex style to express intricate thoughts and feelings, and transmutes it into simplicity again when the emotions have been clarified. A critical reader learns to recognize the uses of both styles and to test them for appropriate application, whether by known classical writers or poets living today.

Because of the vulgarized contemporary environment, English and American readers find the task of literary discrimination especially arduous today. In the seventeenth century the more restricted reading public was more at home with the then prevailing tradition. Defective or harmful training in our own times calls for re-education of the English-language public if it is to qualify afresh for poetic experience.

Among other habits that must be learnt or re-learnt is that of attentive awareness. In the ages when poets were faring best, they were surest of concentrated, rapt attention from their listeners. They have some just grounds for complaint today at the abysmal indifference that has replaced the older deference and absorption. Therefore, before passing judgment on the stranger styles of today, critical readers have an obligation to devote analytical attention to them, in order to understand what it is that is being expressed, and what techniques are being employed to transmit the expression. Only then is an aesthetic judgment warranted.

The responsibility is, in short, twofold. Poets have a responsibility of communication with those whom they address. Past literary history—if they will but study it—makes this clear. Their responsibility is being further clarified, in qualitatively new terms, in the countries now striving to realize a socialist way of life, which assigns a new role to poets and poetry. Here it is demonstrated how poets regain a vital and dynamic position in society after the alienations and perversions of capitalism have been ended. Within all the nationalities of the Soviet Union, poets hold honoured places as contributors to the people's culture, and the same is true of the Republic of China and the people's democracies. Vast sales of books of poems are only a partial index of the wide interest evoked by them; other signs are the public recitations, the lively discussions, the revivals of lost popular treasures in verse, the enthusiastic efforts of amateurs to compete with creative professionals. At the very least, amateur creation stimulates interest, even when expression is shaped in poetic or social stereotypes.

Little is known of all this, though it should be of interest to them, by English poets on both sides of the Atlantic today. The conventional ones move and breathe within the confines of a limited tradition reaching back two or three centuries at most, and bound by the languages of Western Europe. Though disinherited and alienated, they have but small understanding of their plight and its causes. With all their grievances against the society produced by modern capitalism, they accept it as lasting and normal. Except for the few with Left sympathies, they are provincially ignorant or hostile, or both, where other societies are concerned.

The responsibility on the poets' side, then, is to re-evaluate their social position and to act in accordance with a new understanding of it, in the light of much more abundant information. The effect would be to transform their conception of communication with their audiences. We may assume that social activity and understanding would correct the attitudes of contemptuous separateness at present so conspicuous, and would tend to

re-establish communication with the public as one of the objectives of expression.

But this assumes a concomitant responsibility on the part of readers. They too may be expected to qualify as better audiences. Poetry worth reading requires concentrated attention at the least; beyond that it may also require some kind of training in standards and analysis. People study poetry as a discipline, just as they study harmonic analysis of music, in order to heighten their appreciation and to deepen their understanding of the classics. Contemporary verse sometimes exacts the same sort of study, before we are in a position to decide whether or not it has in it some of the qualities that enter into the making of a classic.

In the course of this book certain suggestions will be made to help readers towards such study. At first the examination of modern English poetry will deal with factual matters of detail. The primary questions to be posed are: What effects are achieved, how are they achieved, and for what immediate purpose are they used? These questions will concern the more elementary problems of words and images. But as these matters are explained, questions of ultimate meaning will also be posed, and it will be necessary almost at once to indicate standards of appropriateness and value judgments. The larger meanings of total poetic effort become clear through the analysis of major techniques. When this is made possible—but only then—the problem of ideologies in modern English poetry will be presented and discussed. This will lead us back again to the problem of relations between poet and audience, and the responsibility of poetry today. At the end of the entire process, we shall be in a position to make some final conclusions and summarizing judgments.

But first of all it is necessary to master the verbal techniques in detail, since they frequently stand as an obstacle between poet and audience at the outset. A certain aesthetic pleasure can be derived from the very process of analysis. It is hoped that this book will contribute to this pleasure, and heighten the total

enjoyment of all English poetry that appears, at the end of the scrutiny, to contain elements of lasting value for generations of readers to come.

CHAPTER I: NOTES

1. For instance Wallace Stevens, *Harmonium*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931, p. 37.
2. Herbert Read, 'Lepidoptera', in *Collected Poems*. London: Faber and Guyer, 1926, p. 35.
3. Jean Garrigue, *The Ego and the Centaur*. Norwalk, Conn.: New Directions, 1947, pp. 54 f.
4. I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*. London: 1945, pp. 26 f.

CHAPTER II

POETIC LANGUAGE: WORDS, IMAGES, SYMBOLS

As we undertake the reading of modern poetry we must remind ourselves that it employs, for the most part, the words familiar to us through our conversation with people in ordinary, everyday life. Familiarity is an advantage to the audience at the very outset. Musicians, painters, and sculptors work with media not so familiar, and therefore in order to appreciate their art, a layman must learn how stone and wood, paint and non-spoken sounds can be handled in such a way as to convey aesthetic meaning. Poets may use their more familiar medium in a manner that is strange, even fantastic; but they are addressing us in words and phrases basically intelligible to us. What we study in poetry is not a new medium, but a special, heightened use of one we already know.

There is no sharp division between poetic language and everyday speech, nor even between poetic language and that of science. Both are gradations and nuances within one and the same medium of communication, which belongs to a given national group of speakers as a whole. When poetic language becomes too specialized or too 'precious', as it has sometimes done,[1] it limits itself to a narrow school of composition and is cut off from the national group. Eventually it dies from lack of social currency.

No; poetic language is not a tongue apart, no more than is the language of science, though these two are contrasted special forms of speech. Both draw from the vast reservoir of words current among all members of the community. But the latter contains some special, set terms not generally known except to

students and initiates. These are the technical expressions used to build up the basic definitions and concepts in various sciences. The specialized terms are expected to designate merely: not in any way to suggest pleasure or pain, desirability or undesirability. Scientific vocabulary is most helpful when it is freest from emotional associations. Its purpose is to report relations and events, so far as possible, in a purely factual manner.

Some of the vocabulary of science has been artificially created, for instance words like *dyne, capacitance, uranium, phoneme,* and many more. But even these have clearly been suggested by other words already existing in the linguistic heritage (*dynamic, capacity, Uranus, phonetic,* and so on). Other parts of the scientific vocabulary are made up of terms already current, with much broader meanings, in ordinary use. Their wider associations cause them to suggest emotional, subjective attitudes. In the science of musical analysis we speak of *sharps* and *flats* instead of designating neutrally a mere arithmetical relationship in the vibration frequencies of notes. In linguistics such plastic terms as *strong* and *weak* verbs, *light* and *dark* vowels are to be found, besides more colourless ones like *haplology* and *epenthesis*. Even physics uses commonplace terms like *heat* and *resistance* with special meanings for its own domain. But a certain measure of emotional attitude may be expected to surround these words —albeit faintly—even when strictly employed in a laboratory, because of their carry-over from the activities of passionate, non-scientific life.

Now it is this latter use of language that is the primary concern of poetry. Of course, not all poetic discourse is composed in a white heat of emotion, any more than all scientific exposition is done with complete detachment. But whereas a scientific writer proclaims an intention to eschew emotion, especially in the key words of his technical vocabulary, the poet cultivates this very quality and tries to convey it. He does so within a very wide range. He may treat of the feelings intensely, or he may write with aloofness about an intellectual theme, but the colouration of his language will be emotional to some degree

even in the latter instance. He will exclaim, not merely declare; he will make or imply value judgments, not just register facts and formulas. It is true that Hamlet's soliloquy 'What a piece of work is man!' moves us much more than Pope's 'Essay on Man', but even the latter affects our attitude to that subject as no straight treatise upon it by a sociologist or historian would do. The very choice of verse as a medium indicates that an author deliberately intends to fortify what is being said by the impact of rhythmical stress.

Rhythmical stress, in turn being correlated with the physiological rhythms in people's bodies, tends to arouse an expectation of some kind of emotion, whether vivid or merely pallid, within the reader. The choice of words is also influenced by the mere physical requirements of the scansional pulsation. If the treatment remains what we call 'dull' and 'uninspired', this merely means that the author disappointed the expectations aroused by his medium. Pulsations in language, whether more or less regular, cause us to look for something beyond colourless designation in the contents. If we fail to get it, we have a right to say: 'My expectation has been deceived. This is unsuccessful poetry.'

Obviously, then, the least that can be expected of poetic language is that it should affect us with a sense of newness and importance appropriate to its rhythms. We ask the same of any experience outside of language that is heightened by similar means. Richness of association aids this effect, whereas it would obviously hinder the one towards which science strives. Ambiguity itself, abhorred by science, can help to enrich poetry with multiplied meanings. Doubtful as to what the author intended to say, the reader tries to derive many senses from an ambiguous passage, and he may thus deepen his affective reaction to it.[2] After a certain point, however, he may rebel at the task of disentangling a knot of combined meanings.

Qualities of freshness and enriched significance are the minimum requirements of poetic language, if it is to produce a heightened emotional effect. Frequently these requirements are

met in fragments of ordinary speech, spoken by ordinary people who have no idea that there is anything 'poetic' about the way in which they express themselves. Examples are: 'This *fizz-water* has no *kick* in it'; 'The saw doesn't *bite*'; 'I touched cold iron—and it *stung* me!'; 'Your motor is *growling* (*kicking*)'; 'You are *skating on thin ice.*' Such phrases produce in us a kind of startled awareness, because they seem fresh and vividly sensuous. Clearly, appreciative reaction depends on the newness of the linguistic stimulus. The more trite the word or phrase, the weaker the reaction will be. And it need scarcely be added that intensification of experience through linguistic stimuli is not always pleasant. The intention of the writer or speaker who thus heightens his verbal appeal may be to have you share his loathing, hatred, or contempt, not always or necessarily his approval, love, or admiration. If you respond negatively with emotional strength the appeal is as surely successful as if your response had been positive.

The heightening of such appeal often takes a form technically called metaphor. *Metaphoric language*, in general, tries to gain heightened effects by a transfer of values. The reference to a sensation, an image, or a thought is enriched by *carrying* over (this is the Greek meaning of *metaphor*) of traits from other realms. Some kind of similarity with other sensations, images, or thoughts is observed and reported, as in the examples quoted. Metaphorical language ranges all the way from lifeless stereotypes to very subtle, intricate, and original transfers of meaning. Modern poets are in general inclined to use the subtler and more elaborate metaphors based on individual experience. Some, however, draw freely and profitably on popular figurative speech.

To make plain the principle underlying metaphor, we may begin with examples already familiar in ordinary language; some that are indeed so familiar that we no longer think of them as metaphors. For instance, when human beings are inventing a name for a new object, they often choose a term to designate it that shows that they have observed its resemblance to a part of

the human body. These elementary transfers are particularly numerous in geographical terms and in names for tools and their parts. Such examples as *head*land and *foot*hill come readily to mind. We speak of the *arm* of a gramophone, the *axle* (i.e. shoulder) of a cart-wheel, the *lip* of a cup, the *face* of a watch and its dial *hand*. These expressions may be classified as corporeal metaphors. They are applied, too, to non-physical things, as when Hamlet says: 'You would pluck out the *heart* of my mystery.'

Sense transfer in daily speech creates metaphors by describing one type of sensuous experience in terms of another. The sharps and flats of music, the dark and light vowels of linguistics belong here too. Everyday phrases of the sort are *loud colours, blind alleys, blurred sounds, smooth* or *sharp tastes, colourless tunes*. The transfers of sense impressions are so freely made that their metaphorical nature is often overlooked.

Activity transfer is much broader metaphorical practice. By it the functioning of one realm of work or play is described in terms of another. Everyday language is full of this device also, and again it is so common that it is seldom recognized for what it is: poetic speech in miniature. The biting saw and the kicking motor already mentioned are examples. For instance, if the chief of a personnel bureau is looking over the forms and letters written by workers who wish to obtain a certain job, he may say that he has been *winnowing out* the applications, *separating the chaff from the wheat* (or the *sheep from the goats*), *screening* the candidates, or *skimming off the cream* of them. He would probably be startled if you told him that his language was full of the raw material of poetry. Colloquial speech often uses activity transfers, as when an employee says he has *uphill* work to do which *goes against the grain*, and that he is often *log-jammed* (American usage) with extra assignments. Metaphorical phrases like these have lost their savour from much use, but a moment's reflection will evoke the pioneer activities of carpentering and lumbering from which they sprang. When this is realized, the original poetic value is restored to the phrases.

In some instances, single words, now quite colourless, are seen to contain metaphorical elements if they are traced to their origins and the separate parts are identified. Thus a little etymology will reveal that a *capricious* person is actually *goat*-like (Latin *caper*); that a *deliberate* one is the sort who *weighs* things in *scales* (Latin *libra*); a remorseful one feels something like *biting back* in his conscience (Latin *re-morsus*). A *transgressor* is literally an overstepper of limits.

Latent metaphor of this kind exists in hosts of words. Not only the classical Greek and Latin elements in our language contain such concealed metaphors; they exist also in the native Germanic vocabulary, and in early Scandinavian loan words. A *nostril* is a nose-piercer (the latter element of the word, *tril*, is a modified form of the word *thrill*, to penetrate); a *stirrup* is a climbing rope; a *bitter* thought is one that bites; *atonement* is a making at-one by giving satisfaction through restitution or payment of indemnity.

The study of origins thus reveals many instances of transfer from one realm to another: sometimes there is an interchange of concrete activities, sometimes an abstract one is described in terms of a concrete, and sometimes—though rarely—it is the reverse. Concretes are interchanged with concretes when we speak of someone *sailing* down a street on a bicycle or *driving* a nail into wood or *shaving* off thin slices of potato. Abstracts are made concrete when we *plumb* the depths of despair or *cut* a way to the solution of a problem. Concretes are applied to abstracts when we refer to *acute* angles or *weighty* opinions or *incisive* (etymologically, cutting-in) arguments.

Language about politics and social affairs often yields vivid instances of metaphorical transfer, both in England and America. When they become widely current, these expressions lose their poetic value, but they can still be appreciated after a moment's reflection. The *freezing* of assets, *floors* and *ceilings* placed on wages, *run-away* inflation, a *cold* war, a *wild-cat strike* —all of these terms illustrate metaphorical transfer of one sort or another. After an examination of popular figurative speech,

it is easier to detect the similar if more intricate devices among contemporary poets.

Jaded words are sometimes revivified by poets who consciously appeal to the root meanings given through etymology, as in the word *deliberate* cited above. This type of semantic rejuvenation (as I have elsewhere called it [3]) obviously appeals to a special public enjoying the advantages of a classical education. The device has been used by poets in many ages, notably the Elizabethan. But whereas a relatively larger group of literates had this advantage in Shakespeare's days, our own reading public shows a much smaller proportion of individuals familiar with Latin and Greek. The appeal is therefore more restricted; one may say, more snobbish—at least in our times.

This *semantic rejuvenation* will be found in a number of words and phrases in the poetry of Hart Crane (an American who died in 1932, at the age of thirty-three). When he calls the thundering roar of the underground train *galvothermic*, you are supposed to sense afresh the meaning of heat concealed in the second element of the term. His *graduate opacities* of evening summons the reader to remember that the first word means primarily 'marked off in successive degrees', *opacities*, of course, is simply the Latin equivalent of thicknesses. So T. S. Eliot, speaking of God's will, says that it 'will not leave us, but *prevents* us everywhere' ('East Coker', in *Four Quarters*), and expects the reader to think of Latin *pre-venire* and the sense of coming around and before something—that is, surrounding—rather than the usual sense of hindering (though that too may be implied). John Crowe Ransome speaks of a painted head as '*discovering* maybe thirty unwidowed years', and he means here—as was commonly meant in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—'uncovering' or 'revealing' something (here, thirty unafflicted years of life), but not 'inventing' them.

Poetic effect through etymology was achieved frequently by Emily Dickinson, whose influence can be felt pervasively in contemporary American poetry. She often vivified stale words by reaffirming the meanings of their parts, as when she makes

express once again mean to 'press out' in the physical sense, or *circuit* mean 'a going round about something':

> Tell the truth but tell it slant,
> Success in circuit lies . . .

The familiarity with Latin is sometimes demanded, not for the reconstruction of a complete metaphor, but for a more vivid understanding of a description couched in unfamiliar, rather scholastic terms. For those in the know, so to speak, the images come readily and distinctly; others must consult a dictionary or remain bewildered. Yet a small amount of labour or reflection will often clarify what is being said quite easily, as in this passage from T. S. Eliot. He is describing the experience of a descent into darkness caused by a sterility of the spirit:

> Internal darkness, *deprivation*
> And *destitution* of all *property*,
> *Dessication* of the world of sense,
> *Evacuation* of the world of fancy,
> *Inoperancy* of the world of spirit;
> This is the one way, and the other
> Is the same, not in movement
> But *abstention* from movement; while the world moves
> In *appetency*, on its metalled ways
> Of time past and time future.

All of the abstract words here are to be felt as new and untrite experiences, even the familiar ones like *deprivation*, *destitution*, *abstention* and *property*, which here has the scholastic sense of specific quality (*proprietas*). The four less familiar ones are even more readily sensed thus if their meanings are translated: *desiccation*, a drying out; *evacuation*, an emptying out; *inoperancy*, a failure to work; *appetency*, seeking something with desire. The appeal is clearly to a lettered audience.

The rarity of certain classical terms is sometimes regarded as a virtue in itself. Poets may try to freshen their language by simply importing unusual words from Latin or Greek. Roy Fuller obtains an effect of shock when in 'Soliloquy in an Air

Raid' he speaks of the *necrotomy* of love, calls London an *epicetrum*, and says that his skull suffers *formication*. Eliot becomes pedantic rather than startling, however, in *The Family Reunion*:

> . . . the eye adjusts itself to a twilight
> Where the dead stone is seen to be *batrachian*,
> The *aphyllous* branch *ophidian*.

There is nothing inherently undesirable in highly literate terms, but the total effect must be considered in relation to intention and ideology, to which we shall return in a later chapter. Meantime there is nothing of sense lurking in these words that a good English dictionary (with etymologies) will not reveal.

One special type of semantic rejuvenation may be mentioned separately. It is the formation of new words, or the employment of rarely used ones, by attaching or discarding negative prefixes unexpectedly. The negative term *immaculate*, for instance, is current today, but because of religious associations it is usually applied to abstract ideas. The word *maculate* ('spotted') is less familiar and when physically applied in phrases like 'maculate giraffe' it strikes us with redoubled effect. Many quasi-new terms are made, conversely, by prefixing negative signs to normally positive words: *unleaning* and *unfulfil* (John Crowe Ransome); *unfractioned* idiom (Hart Crane); *inoperancy* (T. S. Eliot, quoted above). E. E. Cummings puns on the word *mankind* and inserts the negative particle into the middle of it: *manunkind* means both the converse of mankind and also man's unkindness to man. Cummings has also created the verb to *unwish*.

Sense transfer, or the description of one physical sensation in terms of another, is a favoured method of metaphorical appeal today, as indeed it has been in the past. Emily Dickinson speaks of a fly's 'blue, uncertain stumbling buzz'. There are numerous instances in Hart Crane's work. Two are contained in this districh about a palm tree:

> *Green rustlings*, more than regal charities
> Drift coolly from that tower of *whispered light*.

Others appear—or are implied—in expressions like 'the swift red flash', 'eyes stammer', 'outspoken buttocks', and 'black windows gargle signals through the roar' (of an underground train). Dylan Thomas refers to 'fire green grass', transfering the intensity of heat to colour. In old-fashioned handbooks of poetry it was sometimes explained that these expressions were in the nature of comparisons; that a full prose statement would be 'green grass as bright as fire', and so on. But the experience conveyed by such images is too direct and instantaneous for such slow analysis. Everyday transfers of sense in language prove that the substitutions occur spontaneously and without distinct consciousness of metaphor. They are not different in technique from Milton's striking and unified phrase 'blind mouths'. For an example of sustained description of similar type, the reader may consult Dylan Thomas's 'Light Breaks Where No Sun Shines', a poem describing the inner physical life of the body, the coursing of its blood, in the terms of light and darkness.

Somewhat akin to sense transfer is the shift of an epithet from a noun it would normally modify to one in the neighbourhood as in Shakespeare's 'majesty of buried Denmark' for 'majesty of the buried King of Denmark'. This occurs particularly when the whole natural environment is described as sharing an intense human feeling. It is a common experience of all people, this sense that strained human emotions are felt by both animate and inanimate nature; a narrator innocent of pretentions to poetry might well find himself saying 'I climbed that suspicious stairway'. Classical poets often transferred their epithets in this way. It was a recognized form of rhetorical embellishment. T. S. Eliot imitates the classical practice in 'Sweeny among the Nightingales'—a poem leading to its conclusion by way of violently disharmonious combinations (vulgar modernity contrasted with this image from lofty Greek tragedy):

> The nightingales are singing near
> The Convent of the Sacred Heart,

And sang within the bloody wood
When Agamemnon cried aloud,
And let their liquid siftings fall
To stain the stiff dishonoured shroud.

Actually, of course, the wood itself was not bloody, but only the floor of the palace where Agamemnon was killed, and it was not so much the shroud that was dishonoured as the relatives of the corpse in it. However, the intensity of feeling and association so merges all parts of the tragic scene that we accept the shifting of epithets as a result of extending human passions from actors to their environment.

The *pathetic fallacy*—the logical error of attributing human feelings to nature—is a term used to describe images like these when they are not successful aesthetically. That is, when the emotions have not been adequately aroused, the intelligence resists these more ambitious transfers of sense and interchanges of epithet. The classical case of resistance to a transfer of feeling was Ruskin's attack on Kingsley's lines

They rowed her in across the foam.
The cruel crawling foam
The cruel hungry foam,
But still the boatmen hear her call the cattle home
Across the sands of Dee.

When the critic objected that foam isn't cruel, nor does it crawl, he was saying that Kingsley had failed to fuse our sensuous and emotional apprehension of the scene at a sufficiently high temperature, as it were, so that we could accept this shift. Part of the inadequacy lies, incidentally, in the unrelieved beat of the rhythm and the monotonous effect of the end-stopped lines, whose regularity inhibits the sweep of stronger feelings. The profounder difficulty arises because the superficial conception of the event gives no warrant for the transfer of feeling to nature. Yet from the purely technical point of view of epithets used, the procedure is the same in the great metaphors of

Shakespeare that attribute feeling to nature: 'Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!'—and so on.

As for *activity transfer*, it too will often be found elaborately exemplified in modern verse. An example is the poem by Dylan Thomas in which the physical act of being born is described in terms of having a suit of clothes—that is, the body of flesh—sewed by a master tailor (God). 'Once below a time', the author tells us (modifying the time-honoured formula introducing fairy tales),

> When my pinned-around-the-spirit
> Cut-to-measure flesh bit,

he burst upon the world, clothed in the suit to be paid for 'on the first of each hardship' (as we pay for ordinary possessions on the first of each month); and his creator is referred to as 'The cloud perched tailor's master with nerves for cotton'. Much of the imagery in the poem is obscure, but the fundamental idea is based on this activity transfer.

In many cases of transfer, the language is deliberately abbreviated. What was baffling at first glance, however, becomes clear when a few missing words are supplied. Wallace Stevens indirectly and elliptically suggests an activity transfer when he says

> The man bent over his guitar
> A shearsman of sorts.

The musician creating music is elliptically identified with a shearer of wool bending over a sheep to cut off its fleece. There is a further transfer worked out in the entire poem: the player on the 'blue' guitar is not just a strumming musician, but a poet creating truth and beauty of a special order. T. S. Eliot, speaking of the world moving 'on its metalled ways / Of time past and time future', throws in the image of a railroad without working it out fully.

Abstracts and concretes. Both of the transfers just discussed involve the substitution of one kind of concrete image for another.

But abstracts may be described in terms of concretes, and vice versa. This interchange is much favoured by contemporary poets. Again, Hart Crane offers many examples. His poem on Brooklyn Bridge in New York City shifts back and forth repeatedly between a physical description and a series of abstract propositions suggested by it:

> Again the traffic lights that skim thy swift
> Unfractioned idiom, immaculate sigh of stars,
> Beading thy path—condense eternity. . . .

This may be paraphrased: 'Once more, at night, we can see the lights of moving traffic speeding across the bridge like bright moving beads. The arc of the Bridge is like a long unbroken idiomatic phrase of language or music; the lights focus a concept of eternity, the uncorrupted music of the spheres: the everlasting and absolute in the concrete and physical.' In 'The Marriage of Faustus and Helen', the poet describes the mind of modern man as pre-empted by baseball-scores, business worries, stock-market quotations, in 'stacked partitions', but the same mind is occasionally brushed by thoughts that, though winged, are also besmirched in the tawdry environment. Instead, however, of saying what concrete images are referred to, Crane calls them 'equivocations':

> Across the stacked partitions of the day—
> Across the memoranda, baseball scores,
> The stenographic smiles and stock quotations
> Smutty wings flash out equivocations.

In this same passage, an abstract term is rendered by a concrete: the imaginings are referred to as 'smutty wings'. The persistent use of concretes to express abstracts appears, by the way. to be one of the tricks employed by Gertrude Stein, aside from her pure repetitions, her puns, and the echoings of words for sound only. Thus a number of the seemingly playful, senseless passages of *Four Saints in Three Acts* can be translated into abstract propositions with the aid of some punctuation and the conversion of concretes into abstracts. The long and often-

quoted passage about 'Pigeons on the grass, alas,' contrasted with a distant 'magpie in the sky'—

> If a magpie in the sky, on the sky, can not cry;
> if the pigeon on the grass, alas!—can, alas—

appears to deal with the contrast between things near and things distant, earthly, and celestial; and the statement 'He asked for a distant magpie as if that made a difference' becomes by substitution 'He desired remote or celestial values as if they were important!'

This kind of writing, by nature formalistic, is a kind of reverse of algebraic substitution: whereas the mathematical formulas generalize, but permit of application by the substitution of concrete known quantities for the abstract symbols, Miss Stein's phrases give a series of baffling concrete images that become more meaningful only when the abstract terms are substituted for them.

Pure repetition, it may be here pointed out, is very frequently used by contemporary poets, not only to underscore an important statement, but actually to engender an effect of hypnosis. Probably never before in the history of the English language have poets relied so heavily on the effects of simple reiteration. Gertrude Stein employs it as a part of her game in playing with words, but also (especially in her rhythmical prose) in an attempt to reflect what she conceives to be the repetitiousness of simple people's undirected thoughts (as in *Three Lives* and her later stories). Others repeat phrases in order to convince the readers that they are of especial importance. Occasionally the conspicuousness of the idea does warrant the repetition, as in the refrain of William Empson's 'Missing Dates': 'The waste remains, the waste remains and kills'. Sometimes the repetition is modelled on the seemingly artless increments of the old ballads, as in E. E. Cummings's 'All in Green Went My Love Riding'.

In the subtler and more meaningful instances, repetitions may

develop a series of slight variations that actually correspond to variations in the thought, as in some of T. S. Eliot's more successful passages of reflection. But the sequence easily approaches the absurd, as here in the beginning of his *Ash-Wednesday*:

> Because I do not hope to turn again
> Because I do not hope
> Because I do not hope to turn . . . .

and

> Because I do not hope to know again. . . .
> Because I do not think
> Because I know I shall not know. . . .

The subject is supposed to be an inner experience of some importance, namely a religious conversion (a 'turning', to use the concrete substitute). What was meant, obviously, to be dignified statement becomes hypnotically senseless because it too closely resembles the pedestrian rhythms of prose chatter.

Juxtapositions of many types are used to bring together other contradictories besides the abstracts and concretes already discussed. The device is often purely grammatical, as when an abstract adjective is placed as epithet beside a concrete noun. Thus: 'the expedient and wicked stones' (Karl Shapiro), 'crashed dispersions' (Hart Crane, meaning 'wrecks of airplanes'), 'saline nothingness' (Hart Crane again), 'wingless truth and larvae' (Edith Sitwell), 'concupiscent curds' (Wallace Stevens). These contradictories include conjunctions of animate and inanimate, human and non-human, and so on, besides abstracts and concretes.

Striking juxtapositions can also be expanded throughout phrases and sentences. The more bizzare the contrast, of course, the more striking the effect, at least superficially. This kind of stimulus in miniature is much affected by T. S. Eliot, who says he has 'measured out his life with coffee spoons', and compares the evening, 'spread out against the sky', to 'a patient etherised upon a table'. Of course there is more to the effect than the pure

shock of the unexpected combination, which is akin to the technique of surrealism in the plastic arts. In both, manner and purpose are inseparably connected. But the larger objectives of the poet will be discussed later, in connection with total patterns and their ideological contents.

Decorations and conceits. When images are developed at some length through various bizarre comparisons and juxtapositions, and when the basic comparison is itself a forced transfer from one field to another widely sundered from it, the result is what the Elizabethans often called a 'conceit'. These extended metaphors were often elaborated on rather intellectual subjects. When the appeal was primarily cerebral, the writing was called 'witty', for 'wit' in the seventeenth century designated intellectual acumen rather than humour. Intellectualized religious poetry, employing conceits more or less frequently, was later designated as 'metaphysical' poetry, though its material was not always metaphysical in the technical, philosophical sense of the word.

It is necessary to look briefly into this historical background of forced transfers and juxtapositions, because the seventeenth-century elaborators of conceits, the metaphysical school in general, have profoundly influenced contemporary poets. The cult of the intellectualized conceit has very largely displaced the search for directly passionate and impassioned imagery appealing to feelings and senses.

In the period of the Tudors and Stuarts, many forms of pure decoration were used in poetry as an intellectual stimulant that had little to do with the deeper feelings and convictions. The vogue of exterior decoration was strong at the very time when some contemporaries and successors of Shakespeare were pouring their deepest feelings and convictions into unforced linguistic expression with unprecedented success. The two styles existed simultaneously, indeed, but it is the former that is the more influential at present. It went so far as to underscore meanings by the external shapes assumed by the verses, so that

poems on altars and crosses, for instance, had their long and short lines so arranged as to depict the outlines of these objects; and the same device of external appeal is again being used today.[4]

The poetic images themselves were often far-fetched and decorative rather than living and impassioned. Very famous in literary history are the daring comparisons and juxtapositions made by such poets as Donne and Vaughan and Crashaw in the early seventeenth century. Some of the themes and purposes of 'witty' writing were mundane in the extreme, as when Donne describes the ecstasy of two lovers in such terms as threading the beads of their eyeballs upon the wire of their glances, or when he hails the body of his mistress as a geographical discovery—'O my America! my new-found-land' (punning on Newfoundland)—or when he elaborately compares the same body, during a fever, to the sky:

> These burnings fits but meteors be
> Whose matter in thee is soon spent.
> Thy beauty, and all parts which are in thee,
> Are unchangeable firmament.

Other conceits are daringly applied to holier matters. Religious themes may be said to invite a 'witty' style because of the many paradoxes involved in the juxtaposition of finite humanity and infinite divinity. Thus George Herbert called spiritual restlessness the divine *pulley* by which man is raised to God; Crashaw compared the pious and prayerful heart to a 'sure housekeeper' who remains at home, not wandering or

> Leaving her chaste abode
> To gad about
> Among the gay mates of the god of flies.

(Notice, by the way, the studied sound effects in *gad*: *gay*: *god*.)

These figures of speech arrest us by their seeming inappropriateness, and some do little more than that. At times they approach absurdity. But when the feeling is strong enough (as it

is in the best poems of this school) the inherent absurdity disappears in the conviction they are designed to impart.

Miniature conceits abound in contemporary English verse. There are several in William Empson's 'This Last Pain'. The poem begins with the straightforward assertion that the ultimate agony envisaged by the Church Fathers was a knowledge, on the part of the damned souls, of the joys they could never aspire to in heaven. This leads the author to present the same metaphysical idea in terms of everyday imagery that contrasts violently with the abstractness of the theme. Fallible, sin-committing man, he says, has a glimpse of the nature of absolute happiness residing in absolute virtue, but he is like a servant peering into a room through the keyhole of a permanently locked door:

> Man, as the prying housemaid of the soul,
> May know her [5] happiness by eye to hole:
> He's safe; the key is lost; he knows
> Door will not open, nor hole close.

(Notice the striking effect, by the way, of the two strongly stressed syllables with identical vowels appearing at the end of the last line.) From this, Empson proceeds to play with the image of thorns, symbols of spiritual agony in the shape of crowns, which can also be applied to the mundane uses of fuel to boil water for fools, and—in the form of ashes—to the scouring of pans:

> Those thorns are crowns which, woven into knots,
> Crackle under and soon boil fool's pots; . . .
> Thorns burn to a consistent ash, like man;
> A splendid cleanser for the frying-pan.

This would seem to ridicule the values of spiritual suffering, by implication. Our highest dreams (that is, the heavenly bliss of the Fathers) are 'magic-lanterned on the smoke of hell' (projected into the inferno of experience); the image on the 'painted,

small, transparent slide' may be the true reality as Plato conceived it, but it is unattainable:

> All those large dreams by which men long live well
> Are magic-lanterned on the smoke of hell;
> This then is real, I have implied,
> A painted, small, transparent slide.

Then, says the poet, let us accept the unreality of aspirations, like the glimpses of an unattainable heaven that are vouchsafed to the damned; let us pretend we believe in something only thus apprehended:

> Feign then what's by a decent tact believed
> And act that state [6] is only so conceived
> And build an edifice of form
> For house where phantoms may keep warm.

The final despairing exhortation after this conceit is—and no wonder!—for us to imagine 'what could not possibly be there', and, inevitably discouraged, to 'learn a style from a despair'.

In so far as Empson is talking about a style of living, we shall return to his challenge later. In so far as he refers to a literary style, we can see that it follows the technique of older metaphysical conceits, both in the unexpectedness of the comparisons and their cerebral appeal.

In many instances contemporary conceits are not only bizarre but very obscure. The underlying figure may be identified, but aspects of it elude the reader because the pertinency of the epithets depends on the poets' unshared, private experience. The concealment of reference is seemingly a part of the attempt to create the atmosphere of baffling non-logic (or inverted logic) characteristic of dreams. Here it would again be possible to suggest parallels with contemporary techniques in music, painting, and sculpture. If a poet designs to immerse us in helpless terrors sprung from baffling ignorance of relations, to introduce us to a world where reason is not only out of control but is meant to be kept out of control, then no technique could be more successful than this: the evocation of a general, vaguely appre-

hended conceit, studded with bizarre metaphors whose relevance is concealed or but dimly apprehended.

Conceits of this type abound in the poetry of Dylan Thomas. The topics have frequently to do with the human body, its inner physical life, the comminatory approach of age, and, above all, death. In one poem, which—appropriately enough—begins with the titular announcement that 'I, in my intricate image, stride on two levels', a parenthetical apostrophe to death develops several disparate metaphors full of obscure allusions. The parenthetical lines are:

> Death instrumental,
> Splitting the long eye open, and the spiral turnkey,
> Your corkscrew grave centred in navel and nipple,
> The neck of the nostril,
> Under the mask and the ether, they making bloody
> The tray of knives, the antiseptic funeral;
> Bring out the black patrol,
> Your monstrous officers and the decaying army,
> The sexton sentinel, garrisoned under thistles,
> A cock-on-a-dunghill
> Crowing to Lazarus the morning is vanity,
> Dust be your saviour under the conjured soil.

Basic to this conceit is one fairly clear activity transfer, which later blurs into a second. Death's effect is at first presented as a medical operation in a hospital, with ministering attendants; but these attendants dissolve into dreamlike vague 'monstrous officers', a patrol or army including the sexton sentinel—a crowing rooster who proclaims (even to one risen like Lazarus from the dead) that all life, even in its morning-time phase, is vanity and that the only salvation is a dusty end. The surgeon death incongruously and nightmarishly operates with a corkscrew, a 'spiral turnkey', which finds its points of entrance into the body (i.e. the corkscrew's 'graves') at its physical apertures.

If the death image here undergoes only one transmutation, and that not too difficult to follow, there are others far more elusive. In the series aptly entitled 'Death is All Metaphors',

birth is described as a putting on of a garment of bones (which suggests various metaphors for sexual intercourse), an emerging from the gravelike cavern after 'three dead seasons' (nine months of gestation) like Rip Van Winkle coming out of a mountain where time is not:

> Rip of the vaults, I took my marrow-ladle
> Out of the wrinkled undertaker's van.
> And, Rip Van Winkle from a timeless cradle,
> Dipped me breast-deep in the descended bone.

The rest of the poem is more obscure. So is another sonnet that combines imagery of playing cards ('sheath-decked jacks', 'queen with a shuffled heart', 'the fake gentleman in suit of spades') with sex metaphors that are both far-fetched and patently physiological in their reference. The poet tells us that 'A climbing sea from Asia had me down / And Jonah's Moby snatched me by the hair', and they associate the poet's experience

> . . . with a black medusa
> By waste seas where the white bear quoted Virgil
> And sirens singing from our lady's sea-straw.

One can follow the imagery that substitutes sea-floods for the surge of fertility, and the interior of a whale ('Jonah's Moby') —or of any other fish, for that matter—with the source of female fecundity: such metaphors were objectively known to folk-lore and primitive art long before Freud gave them a new currency in his special interpretation of dream images. But when we encounter a white bear quoting Virgil, we are in a quite subjective, uncommunicable dream-world. Virgil wrote a very considerable number of lines of verse; we are completely in the dark about the one emanating from Thomas's bear. The whole Odyssey from Asiatic seas, to the eastern Mediterranean of Jonah and Perseus, to the Arctic Ocean of Polar bears, leaves us stranded in ambiguities.

The fundamental image is sometimes fairly clear, but details of metaphorical modern imagery are made so private or so remote that they distract attention from it instead of underscor-

ing it. In Hart Crane's 'Lachrymae Christi' the picture is of a factory standing silent in the spring moonlight; the recondite comparisons serve in a general way to heighten the external chiaroscuro and the discord of subjective feelings involved; but the units of figurative description are so alien to the theme that they require a running commentary, predominantly intellectual, for elucidation:

Text	*Commentary*
Immaculate venom binds The fox's teeth, and swart Thorns freshen on the year's First blood.	Pure but petrifying poison (moonlight) holds rigid the toothlike machinery, and black thorn bushes grow young again in the first sap of spring.

Images as symbols. Spinners of conceits usually develop their images for a single occasion and a single application; they elaborate, habitually, with the intention of an *ad hoc* decoration, and no more. The reader's pleasure lies in visualizing, apprehending, and analysing the interrelations of sensuous appeal and intellectual relevance.

But metaphoric images—pictures of reality carried over into the poetic sphere for purposes of comparison—are sometimes used in a sustained manner, pointing to a wider range of experience than a single event. The wider the range of references, the more symbolic an image is said to be.

Any conventional sign that may substitute for a wide range of specific values is a symbol. Words and methematical symbols are familiar examples. Both are entirely arbitrary and human in their origin, and it is possible to substitute any specific values we choose for the general relations they represent,[7] as in the symbolic algebraic statement, $(a - b)(a + b) = a^2 - b^2$. The word *apple* is also purely conventional. There is nothing about its sounds to indicate why it and no other word is used in English to designate the fruit referred to; and it is so general in its scope that it can subsume all our experiences of individual apples under the one term. Thus it serves the general purposes of linguistic symbolism.

But for the arts, including literature, more specific signs—in fact, very specific objects and images—may serve the purposes of symbolism. What is required is a wide scope of meaning and a richness of association that enable the image to achieve great effects through very concentrated means. Whereas linguistic and mathematical symbols are useful precisely because they are arbitrary, the symbols of art are not so. The reason for their choice usually appears in the messages they convey. The range of meanings may be wide, but it is not indefinite or unlimited.

When the word *apple* is taken as an artistic symbol, over and above its function as a linguistic symbol, it suggests much more than the clustered memories of experiences with real objective apples. The word-sign substituting for those experiences—like a painted or sculptured substitute—may, for instance, in certain circumstances recall the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and their eating of the forbidden fruit; and this story, again, may suggest problems of an abstract theological nature, such as temptation and sin and the fall of man; also philosophical problems even broader in scope, such as fate, choice, and free-will. (Was it foreordained, the image leads us to inquire, that Adam and Eve should eat of the forbidden fruit?) In this way the representation of a simple object becomes a symbol in the artistic sense.

The symbols used in the older arts belonged to the entire community, and were accepted and understood from the point of view of experience socially shared. People required no special commentary to arrive at the various levels of meaning attached to an apple image when it appeared in conjunction with a tree, a serpent, and the figures of a naked man and woman. Similarly, to the ancient Aztecs in Mexico, the image of a serpent and a bird suggested the entire legend of Quetzalcoatl, the friendly god, whose name means snake-bird; and today the same image on the Mexican flag is a symbol for a rich tradition and the people's pride in it. The simplest motifs of folk art—stylized waves, ears of corn, peaks of mountains, animals, etc.—often

symbolize universal meanings besides representing concrete objects.

The community's knowledge and acceptance of symbolic meanings has tended, of course, to make the representations very conventional. The patterns of images were often copied in a very rigid and unoriginal way once they were established, especially in societies where the class relations remained comparatively static for long periods of time. The pictorial arts of ancient Egypt are an example, as are also the designs in weaving, carving, and painting in the modern folk art of isolated agricultural communities. But the wide acceptance of basic symbols can be an advantage too, to an artist who wishes to build them up into something new. He can take the unitary symbols—the birds, snakes, apples, rivers, sheaves of corn—and form a newer, grander total out of them, knowing that his community will already understand the meanings of the separate parts. These will therefore be correctly interpreted in their new totality, without the need for elaborate commentaries. It was thus that Dante worked (though he went far beyond the elementary stage), and also the builders of the Gothic cathedrals.

Modern English poets, on the other hand, and prose writers as well, have been thrown on their own devices in their search for symbols. Their isolation from the community, their frequent hostility to it (as indicated in the first chapter) have caused them to reject the older, publicly acknowledged symbols and to try to create some of their own. Not many have been successful. In general, the prose writers have done better than the poets: Thomas Mann's sanatorium in *Zauberberg* builds itself up into a microcosm of European culture in a certain time and within a certain class; Ibsen's plays use symbols with wide social relevance in fitting association with concrete images (like the poisoned water pointing to social corruption in *An Enemy of the People*), and certain American playwrights have tried a symbolism allied to both realism and to expressionism (for instance, Arthur Miller's recent *Death of a Salesman*). Though limited by various defects of technique and insight, these efforts

still have considerable interest today. The poets, on the other hand, have not gone beyond minor and timorous experiments with symbolic imagery.

There is a pervading symbolism, to take one instance, in Wallace Steven's *Man with the Blue Guitar,* quoted previously. The player on the guitar is a poet; the colour blue symbolizes the creative quality of his art, which transmutes reality into something fresh and new. Hence he is reproached by the common crowd—the 'they' who are contrasted with the poet:

> They said, 'You have a blue guitar.
> You do not play things as they are.'
>
> The man replied: 'Things as they are
> Are changed upon the blue guitar.'
>
> And they said then, 'But play, you must,
> A tune beyond us, yet ourselves.
>
> A tune upon the blue guitar,
> Of things exactly as they are.'

Elsewhere, in *Harmonium,* Stevens shows his ideal poet, under the name of Crispin, undertaking a voyage that is a quest for experience and also for myth, a quest, it would appear, for the sources of genuine symbolism. The poem describes a land fertile in ancient legend (Yucatan), and it uses natural phenomena (sun and moon, day and night) as symbolic metaphors in generalized statements. The underlying contrast is between the cold 'blue' night (Arctic moonlight) of ideal reality, the poet's own milieu, and the lush bright tropical day of the physical world, which he must seek for enrichment and replenishment.

> Thus he conceived his voyaging to be
> An up and down between two elements
> A fluctuating between sun and moon. . . .
> It was a flourishing tropic he required. . . .

And so he hails the reversal to earth and physical day with a hilarious and defiant joy, irreverently placing hallowed Latin phrases side by side with modern slang.

The verse of Stevens has certain virtues of musicality, freshness of imagery, and unhackneyed appeal to the intelligence in individual conceits. All this means originality in small matters. But the passages quoted are enough to show the limited range of the symbolic meanings. They are not sufficient for an architectural construction of any magnitude. When he has said that his poetic quest was like a voyage, that the realm of 'absolute' poetic truth (whatever that may mean) is like night, and crude physical reality is like tropic day, he has said everything. The result is thin and pale, as compared with the great achievements in traditional symbolic art (for instance, the myths in Greek drama) whose meanings were public property. Here, after the symbolic affirmations are translated into propositional statements, there is found to be little sustenance contained in them for the reader's nourishment.

The problem of symbolism, in relation to imagery, brings us to the threshold of another topic: the analysis of complete statements made in modern poetry. The words and separate images are, as it were, the smaller organic units out of which a poem is made. They must be understood in order to apprehend the elements of its meanings. After they have been clarified, however, it is time to inquire: What total pictures or total propositions do they yield to us when we have mastered, so far as possible, their individual significances?

The next chapter will suggest some methods for elucidating these larger problems.

CHAPTER II: NOTES

1. For instance, among some of the mediaeval troubadours who developed an esoteric idiom of their own, *trobar clos*; among Icelandic skalds of the pre-feudal age; among the more artificial of the eighteenth-century poets in France and England—to mention but three examples.

2. See William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1949), for an exposition of this form of enrichment, which is sometimes planned, sometimes fortuitous. Empson tends to make a virtue of ambiguity *per se*, as if clarity were something to be avoided in poetry.

3. *The Gift of Tongues.* New York: Viking Press, 1945. Reprinted as *The Gift of Language.* New York: Dover Publications, 1955.

4. For an example of a modern emblematic poem on a cross, see Lionel Abel in *Poetry*, LVI, May, 1940, p. 77. There are several such poems by Philip B. Rice, *ibid.*, LXV, October, 1944.

5. The soul is frequently given feminine gender in English, following the Latin *anima.* Compare Hamlet's speech to Horatio: 'Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice / And could of men distinguish, her election / Hath sealed thee for herself. . . .'

6. Read: 'Act out that state which is . . .' (enact a condition which we merely conceive in this unreal manner).

7. 'In pure symbolism the relation of symbol and meaning symbolized is purely arbitrary'. Theodore Meyer Greene, *The Arts and the Art of Criticism.* Princeton, 1940.

CHAPTER III

SIMPLE STATEMENTS AND LARGER THEMES

THE reader who has learned to recognize and handle certain ways of interpreting the words and images of poetry has already advanced far towards understanding its total effects. He can at least surmise what are the immediate effects planned by the poet for his smaller units of verse. But after doing this, he may still be puzzled by the message—if there be any—of the whole. In the end he may decide there is no message at all; or that it may be so negligible as to be unrewarding of the effort exacted for its mastery. But that decision itself requires a certain amount of preceding concentration and analysis. In fairness to those modern poets who do offer a reward for applied efforts, the negative decision should not be prematurely made.

The strategy for the comprehension of total meanings in modern poetry resolves itself into two problems. The first is solved (if at all) on the purely linguistic level. We have to pose some quite elementary questions at the very beginning: so elementary, indeed, that a self-conscious aesthete may be contemptuous of them. He may think it beneath his dignity to ask: What is the subject of this sentence? Where does it end?—and so on, because he is impatient to deal with what appear to be 'purely artistic 'matters. Yet elementary analysis of structural parts is necessary in all the arts, no matter how dull it may seem to the impatient and the uninstructed.

The second problem is the inquiry into total meanings. After the analysis of individual statements has clarified them, we may next ask: What is the entire structure that the poet has built of them? What is the total statement to which they contribute?

When these second questions are answered, we are in a position to apply the most fundamental tests in the realm of aesthetics, involving both structures and meanings. We can begin to deal with ultimate objectives in art, and hence, with the broadest problem of all: ideology.

I. SIMPLER STRUCTURES OF THE POETIC SENTENCE

This is not a place to introduce a review of English grammar in any formal sense of the word. Nor is it necessary. Nevertheless a few outstanding and obvious facts must be recalled about the structure of the normal sentence in English before we proceed to discuss the liberties taken with it by contemporary poets.

Normal order of major sentence parts. When simple statements are made in English, as the reader will recall, they place the subject of discourse before the listener, and they attribute to it an action or a state of being. The subject of discourse is normally also the subject of the sentence, in the formal grammatical sense: *Day* breaks; *light* shines; *nightingales* sing; *time* was. The action or state of being is embodied in a predicate (one or more verb forms with modifiers). In these simple examples, the second word of each pair is the simple verb-predicate (*breaks, shines, sing, was*). The subject may be a single word (noun or pronoun), or it may be a series of words or phrases linked together by '*and*'s, each with modifying words or phrases, just as the predicate may be a single verb, or a verb of many parts (*I shall have been waiting*), or a series of verbs linked together (I *came* and *waited* long and *went* away), and each of these may likewise have words or phrases (adverbial modifiers) attached to it. The verb may express an action passing over to a receiver. When the doer of the action stands at the head as subject, the receiver is usually named after the verb and is its object: 'He rubbed his *eyes* and wound the *silver horn.*' No more than this need be recalled to clarify the essential structure of sentences in verse or prose.

Any part of a main statement may be modified by sentence parts (clauses), which themselves contain subjects and predicates but are dependent on the main statement as adjective or adverb modifiers. That is, they are by nature incapable of standing alone, but indicate their dependence on some leading affirmation, as in 'When lilacs last in the door-yard bloomed' (question: What happened then?), 'Whom the gods love' (question: What about such people?), and so on. A whole series of co-ordinated main statements, with or without clause modifiers, may be concatenated by conjunctions like *and* or *but*; these are, of course, independent clauses. The best way to determine empirically whether a sentence element containing a subject and predicate is a main statement or a dependent clause is to find out whether it is capable of standing alone without evoking such questions as: 'What of it?', 'What happened then?', or 'What did it do?'

This, in brief, is the essential doctrine of sentence parts in English, sufficient for our purpose of stylistic analysis.

The question of the ordering of these parts is, however, of prime importance for the analysis of poetry; and order is not always treated with adequate fullness in conventional grammars.

The fundamental order in the normal English sentence is, as has often been pointed out, ACTOR → ACTION → (RECEIVER, if any). That is to say, in ordinary speech we first get an image of the something-or-other—whether vague or abstract or vividly concrete—about which a declaration of some sort is about to be made. This is the actor, usually identical with the grammatical subject. Then the sentence shows that actor as doing something. The action is expressed by the verb. Under 'action' we include states or repose or mere existence: Argus *sleeps*; chaos *was*. The pattern ACTOR → ACTION → (RECEIVER) predominates so strongly in English that we tend always to accept the first image presented to us as the doer of any ensuing action in the sense of being the grammatical subject of the sentence. Usually we are not disappointed. These opening lines, chosen at random, show the expected order normally presented:

The *guns spell* money's ultimate reason
Stephen Spender

My *soul stands* at the window of my room
Karl Shapiro

April is the cruellest month
T. S. Eliot

Light breaks where no sun shines
Dylan Thomas

It must be remembered, however, that there is sometimes a discrepancy. between the formal grammatical subject and the active actor (so to speak) on whom (or which) our attention is really focused. In the sentence 'Long days there were I lived through, somehow', *days* may be the formal grammatical subject, but the actor, in the broader sense of the word, is surely *I*. It is from this discrepancy between grammatical subject and real actor that some difficulties arise in grasping the order of poetic sentences.

Inversions of order. In poetry more often than prose, perhaps, the expected order is reversed at times to gain emphasis. The action may be placed before us visually before we are told who is performing it:

Though the world has slipped and gone
Sounds my loud discordant *cry*
Edith Sitwell

Among these turf-stacks *graze* no iron *horses*
Louis MacNeice

Then out *danced* the *babioun*
Edith Sitwell

Walks down the street
Kaleidoscope a *man*
Muriel Rukeyser

There are many complicated variations of this fundamental interchange of main parts in the English sentence. The receiver, too, may be put first, as in the sentence 'Great pain I suffered.'

The order of minor parts in normal English sentences can be thus briefly described: in general, words, phrases, and clauses are placed as close as possible to the words they modify. Single words more usually precede, and long phrases or clauses usually follow, what is being described. Thus: 'The immortal gods, among whom a dispute arose, once left Olympus where their dwelling was, and asked the old and tired Tiresias, who had known two kinds of life, about the joys of women and of men.' Certain shifts are possible, however, in order to obtain emphasis.

For instance, minor elements may be placed at the head of the sentence, thus delaying the appearance of the actor-words. In our example, such an inversion would be: 'Among whom a dispute arose, the gods . . .' The effect is not only to emphasize the dispute, but also to make more dramatic the entrance of the actors themselves. Inversion of the subject and object will call redoubled attention to the latter: 'Old and tired Tiresias the gods once asked. . .'. When the shifting is warranted by the importance of the element thus brought to the fore, it fits into the requirements of rhetorical and poetic emphasis. If not, it may produce absurd effects.

Redistribution of any modifiers, in fact, brings heightened emphasis to the dislocated parts. Since it is usual to place single words (adjectives and adverbs) before the ones they modify, delaying them to a later position will call special attention to them: thus 'Tiresias, old and tired . . .'. Modifiers made up of clusters of words—phrases and clauses—are conspicuous when put first. The adjectival clause modifying *gods*, in the quoted example, will rarely be made to precede its noun; when it does, as in 'Among whom a dispute arose, the gods . . .', we attune ourselves for something in the epic style of a Milton, who deliberately imitated the complex inversions of Latin. A more usual inversion is the placing of an adverbial phrase or clause at the head of a sentence. In this way we frequently learn about the time, place, or circumstances of an action before the event itself is described, as in Shakespeare's lines, 'When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes . . .', 'Since brass, nor stone, nor

earth, nor boundless sea, / But sad Mortality o'ersways their power . . .'. The suspense heightens the effects of the main actor–action statement when finally it is revealed. Long-continued suspense of this sort creates in sentences an effect that is called periodic.

Even when the actor is introduced normally, in head position, the action may be long delayed. This happens when modifiers of some length are introduced between the subject and predicate. A multiplication of modifiers applied to 'the gods on Olympus' would increase our suspense as we wait to hear what it was that they did. The same effect is obtained if the term meaning 'gods' is repeated in slightly different form a number of times while we wait for a verb: 'The gods, the dwellers on Olympus, the immortal ones . . .'. A series of such terms, 'gods . . . dwellers . . . ones', all applying to the same persons or things, and all having the same function in a sentence, are called terms in apposition. Sometimes there are so many that they constitute a veritable catalogue. Appositions in series are very common in poetic usage; they emphasize and delay at the same time, as in Hamlet's rhythmical prose sentence:

> This goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory;
> this most excellent canopy, the air, look you,
> this brave o'erhanging firmament,
> this majestical roof fretted with golden fire—
> why, it appears no other thing to me
> than a foul and pestilential congregation of vapours.

A number of inversions and delays are to be found in the sentence where T. S. Eliot first mentions Tiresias in *The Waste Land*. Here the actor → action → receiver order would be: 'I, Tiresias, can see the typist.' But 'Tiresias' is separated from the verb by a series of modifiers and appositions, and 'can see' is followed by a second interruption. However, it is not difficult to redistribute these dislocated parts into normal order, since the pattern has not been greatly obscured. A longer interruption is to be found in the opening of Dylan Thomas's 'Hunchback in the Park', where nine lines come between subject and verb:

The *hunchback* in the park
A solitary mister
Propped between trees and water
From the opening of the garden lock
That let the trees and water enter
Until the Sunday sombre bell at dark

Eating bread from a newspaper
Drinking water from the chained cup
That the children filled with gravel
In the fountain basin where I sailed my ship
Slept at night in a dog kennel
But nobody chained him up.

An inversion that yields intensified periodic effect is the displacement of the receiver (object with modifiers) to the initial position where the actor is usually announced. Gerard Manley Hopkins uses it in the second half of the line:

This seeing the sick endears them to us; us too it endears.

(Notice here the effect of the inversion when it follows immediately after a clause ending with the same words in normal order. It gives the complete series *endears*: *us*; *us*: *endears*, or, in general terms: *a b b a*.) In this example the syntax is clear at once, since the pronoun form *us* announces in advance—contrasting as it does with the form *we*—that it cannot be the actor of the sentence, though it does stand in head position. Not so with nouns, since they do not overtly reveal their sentence functions (except for the genitive relation, as in *era's crown*). The initial noun in these lines by Stephen Spender does not show its function as receiver until the true actor has been revealed unmistakably, in the fifth line, as *I* (a form that can never stand for anything else than an actor):

Not palaces, an era's crown
Where the mind dwells, intrigues, rests;
The architectural gold-leaved flower
From people ordered like a single mind,
I build.

The reader may decide whether the emphasis on the inverted recipient, reinforced as it is by appositions, is not excessive, in view of the flat and bald *I build* that it precedes. There is always a danger of anticlimax unless the delayed elements are made impressive enough to match those that are anticipated.

There is another inverted position for the receiver word (object), today limited to poetry, which places it immediately before the verb instead of after it. The normal order of 'The gods asked him' then becomes 'The gods him asked'; the normal 'Ships are sailing the seas' becomes 'Ships the seas are sailing' (as Samuel Johnson wrote in one of his satires). This inversion may give rise to confusion when it places two nouns together at the head. In this case there is nothing to tell which is actor and which is the receiver of the action. Thus in the statement, 'A deep desire his will has shaped,' it is not clear whether the desire shaped the will, or the will shaped the desire. Even Johnson, whose verse is usually quite clear, gives us pause with lines like, 'Their ambush here relentless ruffians lay' (receiver → actor → action) and 'For what but social guilt the friend endears?' (actor → receiver → action).

Such ambiguity inheres in the juxtaposition of the two uninflected nouns, and in general the order *actor → receiver* or *receiver → actor* is often infelicitous. William Empson's

> Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills
> It is not the effort nor the failure tires

is quite clear on a moment's reflection, but that reflection, which is necessary to establish the relation between the poison and the blood (which fills which?) causes a delay in comprehension. Similarly with Alex Comfort's

> I who am nothing and this tissue
> steer,

where the receiver (*tissue*), preceding the verb in abnormal order, likewise calls for a moment's delaying reflection.

Awkwardness rather than unclarity sometimes results when

phrases or clauses are placed before the words they modify instead of after them. It is normal to say 'It was the *great* day *so long anctici-pated*', or 'There was a *hostile* atmosphere, *which seemed to emanate from the group in the corner*', with the single modifiers preceding, and the longer units following, the words modified. In fact, any attempt to transpose longer modifiers to leading position gives a non-English effect: 'the great, so-long-anticipated day', or 'the hostile, emanating-from-the-corner influence'. Although effective on certain occasions, and for certain purposes, such displacements easily become laughable. Dylan Thomas carries them off occasionally with some success, as in phrases like 'pinned-around-the-spirit / Cut-to-measure flesh' (quoted in the preceding chapter). Gerard Manley Hopkins also uses pre-positional phrase modifiers before nouns, relying on intensity of rhythm and of feeling to counterbalance the stylistic awkwardness, as in 'the rolling level *underneath him steady* air', 'mealed-with-yellow sallows', and similar expressions.

Conversely, the placing of simple adjectives after their nouns —where the participles, phrases, and clauses normally go—is an inversion also associated with poetry, and unless skilfully done, it gives the impression of stilted artificiality rather than emphasis. Isaac Rosenberg's description of massed cadavers being ground down under the wheels of an armoured lorry is an obviously earnest and generally successful attempt to evoke the full, horrendous meaning of his picture, but it is marred by unwarranted inversions of simple, undistinguished adjectives:

> And the rusty stakes like *scepters old*
> To stay the flood of brutish men
> Upon our *brothers dear.*

Longfellow's familiar inversion 'This is the forest primeval . . .' is more readily justified. The rhythm of his line may be monotonous, but the word stressed by inversion is at least a sonorous trisyllable of dignified associations. Over-use of inversion may become a mannerism, as in these lines by Gene Derwood:

Gone, gone is Gordon, tall and brilliant lad
Whose mind was science. Now *hollow* his skull
A noble sculpture, is but sunken bone,
His cells *from water* come *by water* laid
Grave-deep, *to water* gone.
Lost, lost the hope we had
Washed to a cipher his splendour and his skill. . . .

These delays and inversions in simple periodic statements call for nothing more than a redistribution of parts to make the meaning clear. A different sort of problem arises when essential parts are omitted entirely.

Omissions. Ellipsis, or the omission of sentence parts, is a regular feature of ordinary speech when full expression would require needless repetition: 'They begged me to come but I said I couldn't.' We are familiar, of course, with the omission of subjects in imperative expressions: 'Save us!' or 'Let him go!' Colloquial ellipsis is as a rule confined to elements that can obviously be furnished from the context.

But in modern poetry, ellipsis is extended to parts not so readily supplied. In extreme cases the omission becomes a manner of teasing the reader; a device for obtaining suspense. A very common trick among contemporaries is not to defer the actor-word by inversion—but to omit it entirely. In the last two lines just quoted from Derwood, for instance, the verb 'is' is omitted; the normal statement would be: 'The hope we had is lost, lost . . .'

Poems are sometimes made to begin with abrupt verbs entirely deprived of subjects, which must be surmised from references in subsequent sentences.

Came in my full youth to the midnight cave
nerves ringing; and this thing I did alone.

Muriel Rukeyser

Stood, at the closed door, and remembered—
Hand on the doorpost faltered, and remembered—
The long ago, the far away . . .

Conrad Aiken

In this my last fever will tell. I the explorer.
The continent deep and new . . .

Genevieve Taggard

In the last example, Miss Taggard has a comprehensible reason for the ellipsis, since the speaker is presented as someone mortally sick and labouring for breath; elsewhere the stylistic trick appears often to degenerate into a pure mannerism. Perhaps, since 'I' is the word most frequently omitted, the poets are trying to minimize the egocentric effects of their lyrics.

Another ellipsis affecting single words is the omission of a relative pronoun normally expected to introduce an adjectival clause. This is a common feature of ordinary speech: 'The man they saw yesterday' instead of 'The man *whom* they saw'. Usually it is a relative pronoun object—the word for a receiver of an action—that is omitted. The clause is thus brought into closer, more intimate contact with the noun or pronoun modified. Such a clause is said in formal grammars to be asyndetic. Otto Jespersen has called it a 'contact clause' because of the close connection with its antecedent.

Here again, obscurity may arise because the ellipsis brings two substantives—often, two uninflected nouns—next to each other without giving any indication, at first glance, of what their relationship is supposed to be. Stephen Spender, describing an express train, says:

Ah, like a comet through flames she moves entranced
Wrapped in her music no bird song, no, nor bough
Breaking with honey buds, shall ever equal.

In the second line the two noun clusters *her music* and *no bird song* are baffling until it is realized that an ellipsis of *which* has brought them together. Here too, in Jean Garrigue's 'Elegy', suppression of the relative pronoun causes a momentary hesitation on the reader's part:

. . . absence is an ignorance
the simplest heart derives at last
a recourse from. . . .

Insertion of *which* or *that* after *ignorance* makes everything clear.

But in some instances asyndetic or contact clauses remain permanently ambiguous, no doubt by the author's intention. The omission of nominative relatives like *who* occasions more difficulty than does that of objective ones, like *whom*. When Empson writes:

> Feign then what's by a decent tact believed
> And act that state is only so conceived

we are thrown off not only because a nominative relative *which* has apparently been suppressed before *is*, but also because the function of *that* is not immediately clear. One does not know at first whether to interpret it as a conjunction meaning *so that*, or a relative pronoun, or—as is presumably intended—as a demonstrative pronoun. In Eliot's lines about Tiresias, quoted above, the next to the last line is a little puzzling because a nominative relative is missing: Tiresias sees 'The typist home at teatime [who] clears her breakfast . . .'. In this instance, however, the total picture is unambiguous, and so the ellipsis causes no serious disturbance.

Absolute constructions are somewhat like elliptical ones, and may interfere with clarity for the same reasons. They are clusters of words that do not modify any one specific part of a sentence, for they are released or 'absolved' from that obligation—but in a general way modify its entire sense. The classical model for this is to be found in Latin: 'The battle-flag having been hung out, Caesar ordered his legions to be drawn up.' Fully elaborated, this would be, 'After the battle-flag had been hung out, Caesar ordered . . .'. Such constructions, studied by many generations of schoolboys, have influenced the style of formal English from the time of King Alfred to today. They are not frequent in colloquial speech, but they turn up from time to time in the more intellectual poets and prose writers. The reader has to recognize them as independent elements and not expect them

to be strictly tied to anything else in the sentence. Sometimes the verbal part of an absolute is omitted, especially when it would be either *being* or *having been*. The effect is to make the construction a still more compact ellipsis.

> My eyes
> Telescoped on decay, *I out of command.*
> *Richard Eberhart*

> If so at any time they come, *the door*
> *always open* and *the hour always ripe*
> *For talk and wine* . . .
> That's hospitality, they'd say.
> *Jean Garrigue*

> Speech after long silence; it is right,
> All other *lovers being estranged or dead,*
> Unfriendly *lamplight hid* under its shade,
> The *curtains drawn* upon unfriendly night,
> That we descant and yet again descant
> Upon the supreme theme of Art and Song. . . .
> *W. B. Yeats*

Incompletion of another sort is found in a special type of English sentence, ignored by many formal grammars, which is called a *presentation*. As the name implies, such a sentence merely presents an image to the listener without making any affirmation about it, except the implied ellipsis that such a thing is to be imagined. Stage directions are obvious examples of presentations. 'A spacious drawing-room. Lofty windows opening upon an autumn garden. Chintz-covered arm-chairs and a divan before a fake renaissance fire-place'—all this means that you are invited to visualize the scene thus presented, with no action as yet announced in connection with it.

Contemporary poets are very notably fond of presentations. It is not unusual for them to begin with an image, even a series of images, that are nothing more than the stage directions for the mind, bidding it arrange an inner scene for actors not yet announced. Thus Robert Lowell begins 'Christmas under

Hooker's Statue' with the simple direction: 'Tonight a black-out.' Or the stage in question may be quite subjective, as when Muriel Rukeyser begins poems or parts of them with such 'metaphysical' directions as these:

> Space to the mind, the painted cave of dream.
> A habit leading to murder, smoky laughter
> hated at first, but necessary later.
> Griefs
> marking indelibly our later loves.

Some of the Genevieve Taggard's shorter poems are single images in presentation, like this one entitled 'Vermont and the North-west Wind':

> Rivers from the drip of dew and the drop of springs
> Wind over Canada cool and the sky that blue
> The Pole has purified.

(Notice the inversions in these lines.)

In all these instances, the presentation is self-sufficient. We are not dealing with an ellipsis, actually: we are receiving a total impression, which was conceived as self-sufficient from the start and was meant to stand so: a grammatical actor element which does not require an action to be predicated of it.

When the main parts of a sentence have been grasped in their correct organizational pattern, allowing for inversions, displacements, omissions, and absolute constructions, then it may be necessary to analyse some matters of grammatical detail within the smaller units. Here the problems are rarely onerous. The most important step is the establishment of the main structure of poetic sentences.

Shifts of construction. Within the parts, the chief difficulties arise from shifts in function, or in other words, shifts in grammatical usage. For example, nouns are made to serve as verbs, adjectives as nouns, prepositions as verbs, and so on. Again, these shifts are not real innovations in the basic possibilities of

English. Since the English language long since lost most of its inflections, it has been able to treat the parts of speech with considerable freedom. A certain type of contemporary journalism, especially in America, exploits this possibility as a means of arresting attention. A favourite device is to use nouns as verbs, even when ordinary verbs are available for the purpose. Journalism then speaks of *authoring* a book instead of writing it, of *signaturing* a document instead of signing it, of *generaling* an army instead of commanding it, and so on. A certain number of these shifts become permanent and accepted; for instance, *to captain* the outfit is not felt to be a strained neologism, whereas *to lieutenant* it would be so regarded.

The grammatical shift of noun to verb is the one most commonly encountered among poets, and is also the most readily recognized. Thus Gerard Manley Hopkins, in his poem of gratitude to God for the beauties of nature, exclaims 'He *fathers*-forth whose beauty is past change: / Praise him.' Hart Crane, describing the bars and cables and pier towers of Brooklyn Bridge, says: '. . . obliquely up bright carrier bars / New octaves *trestle* the twin monoliths. . . .' (Notice the passing evocation, here, of an image from printed music, suggested by *bars*, in a double sense, and *octaves*.) The converse shift of verb into noun many also occur.

Other shifts in category are less usual, both in ordinary speech and in poetic diction. Both permit the use of adjectives as nouns, as when we say 'the rich, the blind, the metaphysicals'. Léonie Adams uses *frail* as a noun to designate the leaves on a tree: '*these frail* which dangle at your branch'. Adverbs and conjunctions are sometimes made to serve temporarily as nouns or adjectives. Individual shifts of this sort flash out occasionally in conversational speech: 'It was a *once-only* performance'; 'Time flies; we never possess *now*'; 'A woman is a *sometime* thing' (the last from the opera *Porgy and Bess*).

In modern verse, E. E. Cummings has practised these unexpected shifts in a sustained idiom of his own. His transfer of simple adverbs into adjectives and nouns is a syntactical way

of making concretes express abstract ideas. A poem dealing with the ineluctability of change begins by asking:

> what if a much of a which of a wind
> gives the truth to summer's lie;

meaning: 'What if a great and special kind of tempest destroys the deceptive summer-like security we enjoy?' It concludes:

> what if a dawn of a doom of a dream
> bites this universe in two,
> peels forever out of his grave
> and sprinkles nowhere with me and you?
> Blow soon to never and never to twice
> (blow life to isn't: blow death to was)
> —all nothing's only our hugest home;
> the most who die, the more we live

The first two lines (underscored by their sound effects) show the same tempest splitting the universe into a dichotomy by reviving eternity (*forever* being resurrected) and abolishing individualness (*me and you* being distributed over *nowhere*). Time and its categories are lost, and this is expressed by making one type of simple adverb of time (used nominally) transform itself into another: *never* replaces *soon*, and is itself permitted to occur *twice*. The interchange of opposites in this tempest of time-become-eternity is emphasized by a crossing of two grammatical patterns in one line: 'the most *who* are' would normally continue as '. . . are those who . . .'; while 'the more we live. . .' would normally be preceded by 'the more we die'. As they stand, we have two statements truncated, and the incompleted surviving parts joined together.

Occasional gaming with the parts of speech may produce a stimulating freshness of language. Mr. Cummings, however, carries the trick so far that it loses its effect, the more so since he shifts his grammatical categories for the sole purpose, apparently, of stating that no categories whatsoever are of any importance. Why, then, bother to shift them? As with other

devices and innovations in poetic language, measure and aptness are important.

2. LONGER STATEMENTS AND THEIR FORMS

With a little patient analysis and the answering of some routine questions, then, most statements in verse become reasonably clear, no matter how obscure and pretentious is the grammatical form in which they are given. What is true of smaller units is also true of the larger. Keeping in mind the various grammatical devices just surveyed—the inversions and delays, the redistributions of elements and the shifts in parts of speech—a reader can nearly always piece together the syntactical skeleton of a coherent normal structure conveying some sort of meaning.

In the most complicated instances, this is more readily done if the poem can be studied on a printed page, at leisure. The very nature of the disorganization presented—if carried to extremes—may demand a visual medium to facilitate the reorganization necessary for comprehension. On the other hand, the intonation of a living voice may also help in this task.

Analysis of some sort is demanded in statements where the essential parts are long delayed. They may be preceded, for instance, by a series of parallel constructions all following the same pattern; by a whole catalogue of nouns or verbs or both, placed in apposition. A good example of delay by such means is this single sentence, which constitutes an entire stanza of Dylan Thomas's 'Ceremony after a Fire Raid.'

> Into the organ pipes and steeples
> Of the luminous cathedrals,
> Into the weathercocks' molten mouths
> Rippling in twelve-winded circles,
> Into the dead clock burning the hour
> Over the urn of sabbaths
> Over the whirling ditch of daybreak
> Over the sun's hovel and the slum of fire
> And the golden pavements laid in requiems,

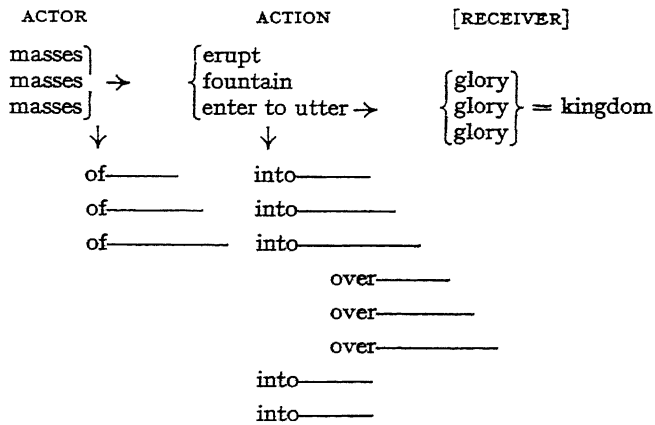
Into the bread in a wheatfield of flames,
Into the wine burning like brandy,
The masses of the sea
The masses of the sea under
The masses of the infant-bearing sea
Erupt, fountain, and enter to utter for ever
Glory glory glory
The sundering ultimate kingdom of genesis' thunder.

Even before identifying the *actor* → *action* sequence here, we may notice how the irregular lengths of lines are counterbalanced by the more regular repetitions of like constructions, which produce effects of unity and symmetry. These are found in the repeated separate phrases beginning with *into* and *over*. Such repetition is often used today in place of regular scanned feet in regular lines. The smaller units are so arranged that, in groups of three, each one is slightly longer than its predecessor. Intuitively, as the reader perceives that these are units of identical function and comparable lengths, he tends to speak and read the longer units with increasing rapidity in order to preserve approximately equal spans of time for all. The result is an increasing of tensity through the increasing of tempo, as in *stretto* passages in music. The third of the *into*-phrases is itself modified by a trinity of *over*-phrases, which increase from one short line to two fairly long ones. After this interruption, there are two more *into*-phrases, a recapitulation such as orators use when they begin a sentence with three clauses of increasing length: 'Because of this . . . and this . . .; because of all these things, I say, and because of their consequences,—*thus and so* is the case.'

As in such prose discourse, so here in the verse, the actor is finally announced at the end of the long-sustained suspense. The actor, here expressed in the word *masses*, is itself thrice repeated with modifiers of increasing length; it is followed by three verbs (*erupt, fountain, enter*), three nouns (*glory* thrice repeated) as receiver-complement of the verb *utter*, and another noun, *kingdom*, in loose apposition with *glory*, in whose modifiers

a single vowel sound is thrice repeated. The juxtaposition of *kingdom* and *glory* is suggested by the Biblical trio: 'Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory . . .'

The essential structure may be presented thus, with the parts rearranged into the normal sequence of actor + modifiers, action + modifiers, receiver.



The total effect suggests musical composition, and this is borne out by details of sound effects. The subject is a tempestuous flood bursting over the land and submerging human settlements—the very steeples of the cathedrals, the roofs topped with weathercocks that whirl about the twelve positions of the compass, as well as the level wheat fields and the city pavements. Images of flood and of conflagration are presented simultaneously. By means of the Biblical allusions—bread and wine, kingdom and glory, genesis—the whole picture is given an air of 'ultimate' vision, as of the end of the world.

In Thomas's poem the synthetic structure is in harmony with the sense being conveyed. The repetitions follow a principle familiar in art both primitive and sophisticated, exemplified in both fairy tales and in modern chamber music: that reiterations in sets of three are generally satisfying because they demand an optimum span of attention. Repetition in twos

arouses the interest but does not heighten it; fours and fives weary it unless there is a recapitulation with fresh material. In addition, fairy tales, epics, ballads, and modern musical forms often agree in introducing an augmentation or inner change in the third repetition of a motif: the king in the fairy tale embraces the spectre of his dead wife only on her third visit when she says:

> How fares my baby? How fares my fawn?
> Thrice have I come; now never again!

This principle of diversified thirds, long familiar to students of popular art, is well applied by Thomas. The three phrases beginning with the word *masses* gain a great effect of surging water by the choice of words and images, the distribution of stress, and especially by the cumulative lengthening of units. The grandiose subject warrants repeated use of climax. What remains unclear is the poet's attitude, whether of exultation, apprehension, or—in so far as there is a parallel expressed between natural and man-made destruction—condemnation. But one does not expect every fragment of quoted verse to contain outspoken definitions of a theoretical nature.

Other periodic sentences in verse are often less successful in combining form and substance appropriately. A periodic sentence may impose the task of redistribution of parts, but when the reader who carries out the task finds that it does not lead to a climax, he will feel cheated and unrewarded for the effort expended. The following stanza by Harry Brown uses a periodic sentence to declare something about poets in comparison with generals. The title is 'The Poet Compared to an Unsuccessful General', and the author is evidently stating that even an eminent one like Julius Caesar, whose death is described, is not to be estimated in terms of equality with a poet.

> Not that bald Caesar, all the world's right arm,
> Who, carried from the mountain of his pride,
> Sprawled as a delta from his russet blood,

His soul sucked like an oyster—not that late
King's darling, by an embassy of knives done
To stateless death beneath the marble wreath
That curled so cold on Pompey's murdered brow
Is the sought man, the poet's looking-glass,
Wherein, grown vast, he sees his variant face
Reflected like a comet in a lens.

For this the normal word order would be: 'The man sought is not. . Caesar'.[1] The description of Caesar's death contains some conceits: his soul is sucked out like an oyster, the blades that struck him are an embassy, when he falls he forms a delta with his blood. But even the conceits and details of description are unclear or trite. To compare lofty pride to a mountain is what C. Day Lewis has called[2] poetic tautology: it is just another way of saying that pride is lofty. To compare the corpse to a delta is confusing, since the pattern resembling a river mouth would presumably be formed by the blood *out-side* the body, not by the body itself. We are disturbed by the epithet 'that late king's darling', since it alludes to an obscure incident in the biography of Caesar, not generally known. And the transferred epithet about Pompey's statue—'on Pompey's murdered brow'—evokes a memory of the murder done on Caesar's former rival that is perhaps too important for such passing allusion.

The single words that constitute Shakespearean echo, such as '*late* darling', '*stateless* death', '*grown* vast' ('Upon what meat does this our Caesar feed / That he is grown so great?'), are inadequately absorbed and give an effect of mere pretentiousness.

So much for details. The basic statement made by the entire passage begins like some of the Shakespearean sonnets (Nos. 14, 55, 107), written when English word order was freer to place the negative adverb in head position; but whereas the sonnets make clear and confident assertions, the sense of this poem leaves us in doubt after the most careful analysis. Does it say that the poet himself is compared to a general, and found superior, as the title promises? Or does it say that someone else is so compared, someone whom the poet looks for, a 'sought man', an

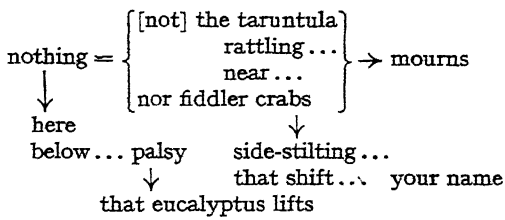
embodiment of an ideal in which his own image is reflected and amplified 'like a comet in a lens' (last three lines)? If so, the poem is not at all about poets, but about those whom they admire, which is (as Shakespeare's own lyrics testify) 'no such matter'.

Periodic and intricately arranged sentences usually demand that the amplified inverted section, which delays the announcement of actor and action, shall be balanced by a corresponding gradual decline to the end. The two parts should have comparable importance. To conclude such statements abruptly after the verb without some further modifiers or appositions is to produce a sense of imbalance. In the poem by Dylan Thomas (see page 67), the conclusion is much shorter than the beginning, but its weighty effect, the slow, strong repetition of *glory*, and the heavy consonant clusters in the last words, very satisfactorily substitute for prolixity. In the following one-sentence poem by Hart Crane, the action word, on the other hand, is the very last one, and it is unmodified.

> The tarantula rattling at the lily's foot
> Across the feet of the dead, laid in white sand
> Near the coral beach—nor zigzag fiddler crabs
> Side-stilting from the path (that shift, subvert
> And anagrammatize your name)—No, nothing here
> Below the palsy that one eucalyptus lifts
> In wrinkled shadows—mourns.

The statement conveys the sense that no creature mourns; the object of the verb is not expressed, but it is implied (from the phrase *your name*) to be an unnamed *you*. The periodic effect is built up by having a series of appositional nouns precede the announcement of the actor in the word *nothing*. The normal order would be 'Nothing—the tarantula . . . nor the crabs . . . —mourns'. The appositions are amplified by dependent modifiers: the tarantula rattles across the root of the lily where the dead man lies buried in the sand; the crabs scuttle sideways as on stilts, defacing his name; the grave itself is described as

located in shadows cast by the trembling (abstract quality of *palsy* for concrete *leaves quivering*) of uplifted eucalyptus branches. The pattern appears thus:



It can be seen from the graphic representation that the single word *mourns* must bear the weight and impact of a long and elaborately inverted subject. The importance of the word is no doubt Crane's justification, and he has deliberately stripped it of modifiers to accentuate the desolation, the very absence of the human mourners. This is, however, an unusual departure from normal structure in a periodic statement.

Besides the identifying of actor and action, and the redistribution of major parts in a sentence, it is sometimes necessary to make sure of key words and functions upon which total structures depend. Conjunctions, relative pronouns, and pronoun antecedents, when omitted, obscure major patterns; when restored, they clarify the outline. Restoration of parts thus becomes one of the tasks required for complete understanding.

Gerard Manley Hopkins omits structural elements, besides inverting those he retains in a special and characteristic word order:

> O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
> Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap
> May who ne'er hung there.

The last line is made coherent by the insertion of *he* as subject of the verb *may hold*, and antecedent of *who*. The sense is: 'Only he who has not hung perilously over the chasms in his own mind can underestimate their dangers.' George Barker imitates the structural peculiarities of Hopkins in his 'Memorial', a poem

written in commemoration of two young seamen lost in a storm in the Pacific (January 1940):

> Was I the shape of Jesus
> When to me hopeward their eyeballs swivelled,
> Saw I was standing in a posture of vague
> Horror, oh paralyzed with mere pity's peace?

The third line may suggest at first glance that *saw I* is a typical poetic inversion of actor and action; but the next words indicate that the pronoun *I* belongs with *was* in a clause that would, in fuller expression, be introduced by the conjunction *that*: 'their eyeballs swivelled, saw that I was standing' (helpless, unlike Jesus when St. Peter appealed to him from the water).

Ambiguity in total structure is also created when key syntactic words such as conjunctions or prepositions or verbal elements are homonyms of other words, as with *like, for, will,* which may have many uses in a sentence. Two obscure lines by Auden, the opening of his 'Petition',[3] hinge on the syntax of *will*:

> Sir, no man's enemy, forgiving all
> But *will* his negative inversion, be prodigal . . .

If the key word is a verb, then *but* means *who . . . not*, as in the colloquial construction: 'There is no man among them but will agree . . .'. *Inversion* then becomes a verb equivalent in meaning to *invert*, by shifted grammatical category, with its object *his negative* preceding it. However, we have evidence elsewhere in Auden's writing that he was fond of the archaic (and historically unjustified) construction of the Elizabethans, who substituted the word *his* for the inflected sign of the possession in nouns. They sometimes wrote 'Sidney his poems' for 'Sidney's poems', and so on. By this substitution *but* must mean *except*, and we get: 'forgiving all except will's inversion'. The rest of the poem is a series of verbal imperatives in parallel construction, asking for certain things that are expressed by nouns also in parallel construction—a pattern very easily followed.

Readers of modern verse are expected, then, to keep a sharp

look-out for key syntactic words, and silently to insert them where needed if the poet has suppressed them.

To summarize briefly the problem of poetic sentence structure: there are two main devices by which single statements are built up to intricate length: by periodic inversions, and by series of parallel syntactic structures directed towards a climax. In both, the separate smaller parts may be displaced and ambiguous. One final pattern to be mentioned is the intertwining of two statements by means of parenthetical insertions. The latter are not always so punctuated:

> A dog named Ego, the snow flakes as kisses
> Fluttered, ran, came with me in December . . .
> *Delmore Schwartz*

In any event, the effect is a combination of two independent clauses of equal importance, one inserted into the other. The parenthesis, when brief, gives the same sort of effect as an absolute, and may be so regarded stylistically. The most that is required of a reader is to hold the inserted statement in suspense in his mind while he pursues the course of the primary one.

When the primary statement has been clarified and its parts reorganized with the aid of the techniques here indicated, the reader can proceed to the most challenging task of all: to analyse the relations of the individual sentences to the total meaningful patterns of which they are parts.

CHAPTER III: NOTES

1. We are justified in placing *man* in the actor's position since the negative *not* is expected in modern English usage to follow the verb embodying the action, not to precede the subject actor. Shakespeare's 'Not from the stars do I my judgment pluck' (Sonnet 14) is an emphatic inversion not characteristic of colloquial prose.

2. C. Day Lewis, *The Poetic Image*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1947, p. 96.

3. The sense of Auden's entire statement appears to be an address to God conceived of as a psychiatrist who is to send us 'power and light' that we may cure 'the intolerable neural itch', the 'liar's quinsy / And the

disortions of ingrown virginity'. In support of this interpretation we have G. M. Hopkins' vocative *Sir* also applied to God; the equation of deity and psychiatrist was later amplified by T. S. Eliot in *The Cocktail Party*. The appropriateness of the identification may be debated, but at least it is clear that the personage addressed by Auden is above and beyond ordinary practitioners, for he is invited to make known who these latter are: 'Publish each healer that in city lives / Or country house at the end of drives. . . .' The rhythm, as well as the sense, seem to require a plural here. If many healers are being spoken of, they surely live in more than one country house. If *country house* is being used as a generic singular, then the distributive plural *drives* is awkwardly combined with it.

CHAPTER IV

LARGER FORMS AND TOTAL EFFECTS

I. LITERARY FORMS IN MODERN POETRY

THE understanding of parts of a poem is, as we have seen, very largely a problem of obtaining a clear picture of the linguistic elements employed. Special uses of words, unexpected juxtapositions, transfers of sense and of imagery affect the basic vocabulary; the grammatical structure of sentences is modified by inversions and omissions, parenthetical insertions, periodic effects, and lengthy sets of items in parallel structure. What is true of single sentences is also true of single poems taken as wholes.

The *sustained parallelism*—the series of similar constructions—is the easiest of the larger patterns to follow. An excellent example of this is to be found in the total structure of a poem like Francis Thompson's 'Hound of Heaven', where the simple statement of the opening line, 'I fled Him', is several times repeated with amplifications, and is varied by substitute verbs ('I pleaded . . ., I tempted . . ., I sought . . .'.) At the same time syntactic structure and basic image alike remain clear throughout all the elaborations. Walt Whitman obtains some of his effects by reinforcing the technique of catalogues through repetitions of similar structures: though his verse form is freer than Thompson's regular stanzas, the sentence elements give a sense of recurring design. Very typically it is a design of exclamatory appositions, presentations, paralleled clauses reinforcing each other rather as do the paired and balanced statements in Biblical prose.

> I am he that walks with the tender and growing night,
> I call to the earth and sea half-held by the night . . .

Sea of stretch'd ground-swells,
Sea breathing broad and convulsive breaths,
Sea of the brine of life and of unshovell'd yet always-ready graves
Howler and scooper of storms, capricious and dainty sea,
I am integral with you, I too am of one phase and all phases . . .
Unscrew the locks from the doors!
Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!
Whoever degrades another degrades me
And whatever is done or said returns at last to me.

This manner of achieving pattern, which appeared revolutionary in its day, has been widely imitated, and is now a familiarly accepted convention. It continues to be used as a favourite technique today. It is not found so often among the formalistic writers as among those who aim at being impressive while they also try to remain clear.

The *intertwining* of simultaneous statements is another method of developing longer units. It may be compared to the insertion of absolutes and parenthetical remarks in single sentences. Here the author plays with several themes at once, frequently causing them to overlap and to combine in the end in a single complex theme. Writers of prose fiction have made extensive use of this method, when they start a novel with several unrelated groups of characters who undergo separate parallel developments and are eventually merged in a unified concluding action. In poetry, Ezra Pound has worked out a special method of announcing and developing numerous themes at once by fragmentary allusions and partial, quoted phrases. The units are, however, so splintered and dislocated, and they interrupt one another so frequently, that they appear rather as parts of puzzles than as genuine poetic ingredients. A portion of a statement (quite often a section of a quotation or a very private allusion) is introduced on the first page, interrupted by other fragments, dropped, reintroduced again in uncompleted form several pages afterwards, then slightly amplified on a third occasion, and finally (but not always) concluded or elucidated

much later. The quotations from earlier literature are placed side by side with references to vulgar modernity. In this way contemporary life is cheapened by the device of juxtaposition with specially chosen samples of the past.

This is simply a more sustained and more intricate type of the interweaving technique used by T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*, for instance, here:

> . . . 'Do
> 'You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
> 'Nothing?'
> I remember
> Those are pearls that were his eyes.
> 'Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?
> But
> O O O O that Shakespeherean Rag—
> It's so elegant
> So intelligent. . . .

A quotation from *The Tempest* is followed by a reference to Shakespeare in distorted jazz rhythm, just as Pound interlards his references to Homeric and other mythical heroes with allusions to such items of modern culture as tawdry advertising, garbage-cans, and latrines. Despite the multiple themes, the effects are very repetitious in both cases.

The *delay* of a poem's essential statement to the very end can also be found from time to time in modern verse, corresponding to periodic structure of single sentences. Sonnets frequently defer their main point thus, and express it in the last line or two, in the manner of the Elizabethans. There is periodic structure of other poems of comparable length—say, twelve to sixteen or twenty lines. The parts are so ordered that contingent conditions or circumstances are first expressed (*if* or *when* or *because* so-and-so . . .), and then the main idea (*then* so-and-so). So it is in Shakespeare's 'When, in disgrace with Fortune and mens' eyes . . .', and so it is with the opening twenty-four-line passage of Muriel Rukeyser's 'Ajanta', which concludes a series of descriptive statements with these lines:

So came I between heaven and my grave
past the serene smile of the *voyeur*, to
this cave where the myth enters the heart again.

The reference is to a cave in India painted by Buddhist monks, and taken to represent the cave of the imagination transformed in art. Even when the main idea of a poem has been previously expressed, it may be recapitulated at the end with exceptional emphasis, which also gives the effect of periodicity. Dylan Thomas concludes a set of statements on time's ravages, cast in unconventional sonnet form, with this summary:

Time tracks the sound of shape on man and cloud,
On rose and icicle and the ringing handprint.

The literary forms—that is, forms of entire works—appearing in modern English poetry are not numerous. Of the traditional ones, recognized, defined, and discussed long since by the literary critics of Greece and Rome these are exemplified today: adaptations of the epic, verse essay, verse drama, and the lyric in many forms.

The *epic*, however, appears rather as a scholarly exercise than a living art form. Efforts like Alfred Noyes's bombastic *Drake* (pre-1917) are rejected as artificially derivative. The ambitious *John Brown's Body* by Stephen Vincent Benét (1927), though indubitably an earnest attempt, is least successful as narrative and most successful in its shorter lyrical passages. The short prose speech actually made by John Brown on trial is far more effective than most of the verse. For modern readers, the novel has almost completely taken the place of narrative in verse. The reason has partly to do, as was indicated in the first chapter, with the extinction of popular sources for the epic: audiences accustomed to listen, or at least audiences still in touch with a recently flourishing school of native epic declamation. Remote models of an alien school—Homer and Virgil, *Beowulf*, *La Chanson de Roland*, the *Nibelungenlied*—do not serve in lieu of such traditions. Satire in verse has a certain currency today, on the other hand: e.g. Auden's *Age of Anxiety*. Its more intellectual

role does not call for a background of recited delivery, and its appeal is to the more restricted audience that has always enjoyed such works.

The *poetic drama*, on the other hand, has enjoyed something of a real revival, as the successes of Maxwell Anderson, Christopher Fry, and T. S. Eliot will testify. The vitality of the theatre has been continuous, and the people's love for classical poetic drama has received some measure of recognition from producers—although to a very limited extent, and for the pleasure of very few out of the total populations of America and England. Moreover, the tradition of writing original verse drama never quite died out, though it was for long reduced to a lifeless imitation of the Elizabethans.

The successful poetic dramatists today are those who have succeeded in moulding their language into a vehicle appropriate to the contemporary stage. Accepting the changed tone of modern life, which for a variety of reasons prefers subdued effects in dress, deportment, decoration, and language, the authors have definitively broken with the tradition of flamboyant Elizabethan speech, so studiously imitated from D' Avenant and Dryden to the Victorians. Instead, they prefer rhythms and images that are understressed and understated. The medium is in fact so unobtrusive, through a carefully colloquialized style, that a listener sometimes realizes only late in the first act of a new poetic venture that he is actually listening to verse. Later the dialogue may rise to more impassioned discourse, attempting at least to approximate the style of the great English classical plays. By this time the listener is ready to accept it, having been unobtrusively prepared so far as the language is concerned. But he will accept it only, of course, if the conflicts and issues in the play are worthy of the heightened diction. T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* contains some passages (mostly choruses) that successfully introduce elevated language after preparation in a quieter style. This play, and one or two others, have demonstrated the practicability of verse speech in the theatre today.

It is the lyric, however, which is the most flourishing form of poetic expression in our times. Though cut off from oral delivery in all but exceptional cases, this form continues a vital, if rather exclusive, career on the printed page. The units are in general brief; at most they rarely exceed the length of a Greek ode or a Latin versified epistle. They assume various forms of discourse, such as simple statement, narrative, exhortation, and exclamation, but most of them are centred on the intensified experiences of some individual ego—most often the writer's ego, real or assumed for the occasion—which calls for heightened expression in a relatively short span of time. The typical convention is that the writer is speaking directly and personally to the reader (listener). Descriptions and general statements and even social or political manifestos, if cast as lyrics, are usually coloured strongly with the subjective element appropriate to confessions of individual faith.

2. PERSONAL AND NON-PERSONAL ELEMENTS

To a greater or less degree, indeed, lyrics are ego-centred monologues of various types. Some catch a mere moment of experience—ranging from the serene to the passionate—and confide it to the reader as something 'I' can personally report. The 'I' is, of course, often a fiction based on the poet's identification of himself with an imagined personality. The identification becomes almost complete in instances of dramatic monologue. Some lyrics, imitating the Greek Anthology of lyrical epitaphs on tombs, have an 'I' speak who represents someone as dead but still addressing us, from a viewpoint beyond life. In these cases the poet assumes the dead personality for the moment, and uses it to express an individual's experience of a lifetime compressed into concise utterance, often ironic or despairing. Edgar Lee Masters adapted the ancient form to modern American circumstances in *The Spoon River Anthology*. T. S. Eliot has echoed it, by way of an echo in Dante, in *The Waste Land*. Here a vulgar modern girl is made to speak in the

accents of an ancient tombstone inscription that reduces all of her life to vanity in a few desolate lines:

> Trams and dusty trees.
> Highbury bore me—Richmond and Kew
> Undid me. By Richmond I raised my knees
> Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe.

Here, as more than once elsewhere in Eliot, vanity and futility are expressed in terms of a pointless sexual seduction of a girl from the 'lower classes'.

Sometimes the lyrical 'I' of modern poetry gives a report on an inner experience so subjective that it is all but impossible to convey to another person. When the matter of experience is a dream state, or an irrational psychological condition resembling dreams, then public, communal experience is left far behind and the expression may be very baffling indeed. The usual method is to develop whole sentences and passages in which privately symbolic images—including those usually forbidden in polite social intercourse—shift and blur into one another. This evokes a sense of being lost in great uncharted spaces, where the signposts of day and normal life have disappeared (compare the paintings of Dali, Chirico, and others). The panorama may pass from dream into nightmare by the technique of shocking departures from the to-be-expected series of events; these goad the reader's attention and propel him forward to an end he never reaches and for a purpose he can never understand.

The surrealist cinema offers a still better analogy than does painting to the nightmare effects of some modern lyrical poetry. In the experimental surrealist films by Jean Cocteau—for instance, *Blood of a Poet* and *Orpheus*—the action occurs in a time and space released from the known laws of nature and society. Thus statues may come to life or people may freeze into statues, a character may travel from present to past time or walk inverted on a ceiling; an elegantly dressed couple may play cards out of doors in the midst of a snowstorm, noticing neither the weather about them nor the murder that is done at their feet,

and of course doing nothing about either in the rational, purposeful manner of people awake. There is obvious symbolism in all this, but it leads nowhere.

A similar effect is obtained in lyric poetry when a whole unit is made up of dreamlike images manipulated much as in surrealist plastic art. We have mentioned Dylan Thomas's white bear quoting Virgil as a single instance of this effect. Here is one of his complete poems constructed of similar materials. It is called a sonnet despite its absence of conventional rhyme.

> Altarwise by owl-light in the half-way house
> The gentleman lay graveward with his furies;
> Abaddon in the hangnail cracked from Adam,
> And, from his fork, a dog among the fairies,
> The atlas-eater with a jaw for news,
> Bit out the mandrake with tomorrow's scream.
> Then, penny-eyed, that gentleman of wounds,
> Old cock from nowheres and the heaven's egg,
> With bones unbuttoned to the half-way winds,
> Hatched from the windy salvage on one leg,
> Scraped at my cradle in a walking word
> That night of time under the Christward shelter:
> I am the long world's gentleman, he said,
> And share my bed with Capricorn and Cancer.

Here we have examples of the poet's typical preoccupation with death, bones, and skeletons; and consequently with time also, seen exclusively as an agency of destruction. The images are chosen from a system elaborated especially to reinforce the familiar theme by symbols. The technique is an often-repeated substitution of concrete images for abstract ideas. The term *half-way*, applied to both house and winds, suggests time as an interval between two eternities. The long gentleman with his bones unbuttoned has been interpreted by Elder Olson as an image taken from the Zodiac (Hercules); [1] he also suggests a recognizable figure for time-eating death; he dwells in Abaddon (place of the damned), is embodied in the bone splinter (hangnail) cracked from Adam (i.e. death caused by original sin?); he

comes from nowhere but is at home on the earth (the heaven's egg), he—or his hound?—consumes geography (concretely, the atlas) and history (concretely, news) and all suffering, both present and future (tomorrow's scream). He has summoned the poet to active existence with a command to arise: 'Scraped at my cradle in a walking word'; and boasted of his broad dominion, since he lies down with Capricorn and Cancer. The atmosphere is made nightmarish by choice of details such as owl-light (for night), graves, furies, and the screaming mandrake. Indefinite though the images may be, they succeed in bringing to mind a macabre pageant such as painters and wood-engravers of the fifteenth and sixteen centuries—precursors, some of them, of modern surrealism!—portrayed in their Triumphs of Death. In the centre of the reported experience, as is typical with lyrics, we find the poet's ego: it was on '*my* cradle', he tells us, that death came tapping: death, the very messenger and companion of life.

Now the egocentricity of the lyric, whether clearly expressed or surrealistically obscured, has presented some knotty problems to writers on the theory of literary art. They have noticed that the lyric alone tends to be thus strikingly subjective. Other forms of literary expression, as exemplified in the drama, the epic, the novel, and so on, have a social function so obvious as to be inescapable. That social function has compelled critics—not only Marxists, but others as well—to accept community experience as the basic fact in artistic expression, at least for such art forms. The validity of the assumption is easily verified in tracing the historical origins of classical Greek and mediaeval European drama. Its tensions and releases and purifications of the spirit obviously arose from conflicts in relation to a code of values and taboos accepted by an entire community. Agreement on this code of standards is necessary if the entire audience is to share vicariously in the play's 'pity and terror' and ultimate reconciliations, about which Aristotle so expertly wrote. In short, the communication between dramatist and audience is based on an interplay of accepted responsibilities.

Idealist critics [1a] have written about the relationship between dramatist and public, as if both were dealing with a communal or 'racial' soul, ideal and unchanging, which had to be made the point of departure of all literary criticism. Materialist critics have, on the other hand, explored the way in which homogeneous social attitudes and codes of behaviour, far from being absolute, have sprung from material conditions and been modified by man-made transformations in those conditions, thus producing the communal consent to the general standards underlying literary judgment and appreciation. But the apparent waywardness of the ego-centred lyric has provoked much speculation. Why, it has been asked, does this one literary form appear to turn away from public standards and concerns?

Here again idealist criticism, notably in Germany, has given its own solution to the problem. It has stated that the lyrical poet, even in the most private scrutiny of his own psyche for literary material, discovers to his amazement and horror that he is actually gazing into a kind of abyss, full of the dark memories of his entire 'race'. Thinking that he has been exploring something of his own, his special ego, he has actually, they say, been plumbing the depths of accumulated racial experience, which he merely focuses on his ego when he writes in the first person singular. His function is therefore not essentially different, despite appearances, from that of the dramatist, who interprets the community heritage in more objective forms.

Certain concepts of analytical psychology have tended to strengthen this sort of thinking among literary critics. Since poets often use or even create mythological figures as symbols for broad human experience, they and their interpreters the critics are often allured by psychological theories that appeal to the mighty figures of ancient drama as archetypes: to Orestes and Electra, Oedipus, Laius, Jocasta, and the rest. The danger for criticism, and it may well be for psychology too, lies in an assumption that these ancient types of human experience are in the nature of tyrannical absolutes: unbreakable patterns

of behaviour, which, it claims, are universally binding on humanity. (Actually, they have sprung from a special form of class society.) Many poets writing English today, whether consciously or not, have absorbed Jung's postulates, and they reflect them in their creations. Their symbols, even their dream-symbols, which appear to be so freely and arbitrarily chosen, are actually taken from a rigidly patterned and static system, precluding the thought of constructive progress.

The interpretation of the creative writer's personality as a bundle of petrified symbols must be rejected. For one thing, it is out of harmony with the findings of modern anthropology, which demonstrate the adaptability of human psychology to many patterns of social code and sanction. It is contradicted by the new elevation of the human personality and its standards of behaviour on the part of humanity that is shaping itself into socialism. In literature, an acceptance of the Jungian absolutes as universal standards would mean confining ourselves provincially to Western culture, conditioned as it is by one type of social experience, and ignoring the literatures produced by other communal experience requiring no Oedipus or Jocasta as symbols.

The valid approach to our problem lies elsewhere than in the symbol-haunted personal ego of the writer, taken in isolation. It is to be found in his relation to the social group surrounding him—a dynamic and *changing* group—and in his way of communicating with it.

Writers on language have long since recognized that the spoken medium is itself supremely social. It is a linguistic commonplace to point out that a solitary human being, cut off from his fellows, gradually loses command of it. Speech and thinking are combined on the human level into a function that presupposes a community surrounding it. Even an interior monologue, something unspoken within us corresponding to the exterior expression of spoken monologue, presupposes some personality to whom the discourse is addressed. And that projected personality, by which we test our inner thoughts and

expressions, is built up from multiple experiences of family, group, and community judgments. In inner debate the ego and the projected interlocutor can be clearly detected, somewhat as in the mediaeval morality plays, or in Marlowe's *Faustus*, where good and bad angels dispute audibly for the hero's soul. They are, of course, projected aspects of that soul engaged in an inner debate. In ordinary interior monologue, the communal *alter ego*, standing for social taboos and sanctions, is more passive, but its influence is felt pervasively in a shaping, hindering, or encouraging role.

The initial stages, even, in the composition of a very personal lyrical statement are also silently but insistently affected by the constellation of human beings surrounding the poet. Here too there is an interplay of responsibilities, though less obvious than in the case of the dramatist. The historical code built up by the group through generations and laid upon the writer is no more fixed and unchanging than any other human institution, but the individual reckons with it and feels its compulsion more or less directly. He may accept it or dissent from it or try to change it, but he feels it constantly as he engages in his inner duologue (appearing to him to be a monologue), which may eventually flower into verse.

An individual's aesthetic conscience is closely related to community attitudes of one sort or another. Under the pressure of contemporary social changes, it may cause a poet to describe rural dirt and ugliness in an age when most of his colleagues are still prettifying the countryside with trite figures from classical idylls. Or, again, it may induce him to accept inherited conventions unquestioningly; or to call attention to them by flouting or satirizing them. But in each case his choice is being shaped by crystallized social norms, present and past. The merest description of daffodils and mountains is executed in relation to community attitudes on this subject: as, whether they are appropriate to verse, whether they can or should be isolated for contemplation by themselves, what sort of contemplation they should evoke, whether or not one should detach

them from the human background—that 'still, sad music of humanity', which even Wordsworth could not escape in his Cumberland retreat. Either by accepting or rejecting prevailing social attitudes, therefore, the poet does homage to them, wittingly or unwittingly.

But this relationship of poet to community, even in the most subjective phases of composing the most personal of lyrics, calls attention to the pivotal problem of intelligibility. The question is: Must there always be communication? We cannot escape the conclusion that communication must exist in some form and to some degree. Not even the lyric, as we have just remarked, escapes communal responsibilities. Sidney Finkelstein has called all the arts 'languages', as a way of stressing their obligation to speak to us comprehensibly, to convey commentaries about personal and social life in interrelation.[2]

No critic worth reading has ever demanded that the communication between artist and public should be facile. Techniques of expression may require considerable study before the substance becomes clear. Humanity has welcomed and held dear the work of many writers whose intricacies of thought and expression, in certain respects, have called for the work of generations of commentators. Dante is an outstanding example; Shakespeare too, in many passages, despite his closeness to the broad popular speech of the masses, and his constant use of it. General readers and critics alike have the responsibility, when confronted with something new that claims to be art, of trying to accept its challenge and to search for the sense that it presumably tries to communicate. This was the assumption with which we began in the first chapter: that correct comprehension is the first step in literary experience, after which comes the occasion for critical estimate. The exposition of language techniques has been offered here as a means of clarifying the communication in order to arrive ultimately at certain standards of aesthetic judgment.

At this point, then, some of the more elementary standards will be proposed which rest almost exclusively on technique. The judgment of messages and ideologies will be deferred to the next chapter.

Ease versus strain is surely one of the most obvious of tests. No matter how complicated the technique, no matter how much it demands of the reader, the creator's mastery of it is expected to convey itself in an effect of sureness and confidence that is shared by the reader. Familiar examples are to be found in the loftier and more intricate passages of writers like Chaucer and Shakespeare. The meditations of a Troilus, the soliloquies of a Hamlet, the invectives of a King Lear may be long-sustained and intricately composed, full of delays, inversions, and periodic effects; but once you have embarked on the course of those statements, you feel that you are in sure hands. True, there is a demand placed on your attention and on your profounder feelings. Passive receptivity is not enough. You are not permitted to lapse from active collaboration, but you also know that you will not be cheated of the trust you place in the poet's guidance through the sequence of thoughts. It is your confidence in the guidance that creates the sense of ease. When he is being most successful the author follows Hamlet's advice on acting: 'For in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance, that may give smoothness.' The temperance at the heart of apparent extremes, whether of cerebral complexities or intense feelings, is the cause of ease in the midst of strain.

Some contemporary poetry does create ease within the complexities. Perhaps it may be said that contemporary British poets have mastered the combination of the two contradictory traits better than the Americans, for the simple reason that their training has more often included a thorough formal schooling in

linguistic structure. Edith Sitwell, for instance, always appears to have complete mastery of her medium in the very act of experimenting most elaborately with it. At his best, Dylan Thomas handles his special technique with the confidence necessary to produce ease, as in the description of the storm quoted in the preceding chapter. Structural clarity helps to a certain extent when the imagery itself is not sharply defined, as in the dream-like poem of Thomas which has just been cited. Hart Crane, too, is at times capable of bringing off intricate effects with apparent ease, but on other occasions, as in a poem like 'Lachrymae Christi', he engenders unease and a sense of confusion. Here ambiguity frustrates without contributing enrichment of the theme. The lack of balance may be seen in the complete apostrophe to spring night, which presents a moonlight picture contrasted with the daytime ugliness of an industrial town.

> And the nights opening
> Chant pyramids,—
> Anoint with innocence,—recall
> To music and retrieve what injuries
> Had galvanized the eyes.
> While chime
> Beneath and all around
> Distilling clemencies,—worms'
> Inaudible whistle, tunnelling
> Not penitence
> But song, as these
> Perpetual fountains, vines,—
> Thy Nazarene and tinder eyes.[3]

The doubtful syntax, the too rapid and elliptical shifting of imagery from one realm to another (as in 'Nazarene and tinder eyes'), the unexplained and undeveloped comparisons, give the impression that Crane himself was labouring at something he did not bring to fruition; that the reader is not at fault, nor can he be charged with lassitude, if he remains hampered with a sense of strain after the most devoted efforts at comprehension. It may fairly be said that a number of contemporary poets have

cultivated syntactic confusion and strain as if it were a substitute for profundity of thought.

On the other hand, such frustrating strain should not be confused with a sense of effort deliberately evoked for an understandable aesthetic reason. The difference is that in the latter case the poet remains in control while producing his planned effect. When Herbert Read is describing people struggling upwards on a mountain-side (the image is symbolic) he uses language to convey the strain they felt, but does not burden us with the sense of effort he himself may have felt during the act of composition.

> The path is steep
> Narrowing between rock walls: an uncapp'd cavern
> Where the ledges drip and the anguish'd winds
> Woo hollows of eternal woe.
> And there a rheumy host of men
> Climb burden'd, stumbling in the dark unless
> The clouds are torn to let the light
> Stray raggedly across the land. The straining thongs
> Cut their breasts: breasts will break
> And spill their bloody treasure on the rocks
> But still the unbroken with their burdens will climb
> Between the sheer limits of stone
> Into the tempest that gathers
> Like a dark crown above the hill.

Certain elements of great poetry are lacking here; but at least the author has successfully maintained the sense of ease on his own part while he is transmitting (through sounds and images) the sense of strain endured by his climbers. His method of achieving this latter effect leads to a second elementary criterion in the judging of verse.

Concordance of techniques to subjects. The subject matter and the form constitute a unity in all art, of course, which cannot be artificially broken down into completely separate elements. But in less successful creations the aesthetic unity is split, and the

reader is made aware of an opposition. He may find himself saying: 'A splendid and original thought!—but the expression is trite and flat', as, for instance, in the earnest, well-intentioned work of certain nineteenth-century American poets writing against slavery: for instance, John Greenleaf Whittier. Today, on the other hand, the opposition is more apt to go the other way. We are apt to say: 'How original and stimulating is the technique!—but how sterile or misleading is the thought!'

The consonance between theme and expression may be tested on various levels, and at best will be found to exist on all of them. The treatment of physical sound—both harmonies and rhythms—can be adapted to reinforce the meaning of what is said. (See Part II, chapter 6.) The choice of words may strengthen poetic images by means of recovered etymology, association, and like techniques, and thus heighten the alliance between language and imagery. The organization of ideas may be paralleled by the organization of sentences: delays, climaxes, inversions, parallelisms in the former being appropriately reflected in the grammatical structure of the latter. Throughout the separate chapters of this book we have considered these various separate aspects of concordance. When they are found to be present in poetry, they give the first basis for aesthetic approval.

Some examples will clarify what is meant by concordance of subject-matter to expression. It will be convenient to examine several poems dealing with the same sort of theme, namely elegies, and to test them for fittingness of style to substance.

First a short instance. There is a simple brief passage in V. Sackville-West's *The Land*, in which the poet speaks of a dead farmer, one of the many nameless folk who are celebrated in this verse tribute to the English countryside:

> . . . that pious yeoman laid to rest
> Beneath the legend that told all his life
> In five hard words: 'He tilled the soil well.'

On the level of mere sound, we can at once recognize appropriateness in the transition from the regular, conventional beat

in the first line, to the slightly irregular beat of the second, and finally to the conspicuous harshness of the last.[4] Here the first four words, which require slow reading, announce both the nature and the importance of what is coming, in a successful combination of sound and sense. The last part of the line, the epitaph, is designed to describe and convey in sound the sense of a life spent in strenuous, unbroken labour on the land. Here an effect of harshness is produced by the three strongly stressed and juxtaposed syllables, *still, soil, well,* which are not similar enough to create harmony, but are similar enough to make for difficulty in pronunciation. Moreover, the sense of laboriousness is heightened by an unspoken word—*toil*—that is suggested by the context and by the presence of the rhyme-word *soil* in the same line. The preceding accented word *till* gives a memory of the initial consonant to echo while *soil* is being said. Sound and sense thus reinforce each other. So do vocabulary and sense, for the terms *pious, yeoman,* and *legend,* and even the phrase 'laid to rest', are all associated with the archaic customs that linger in traditional rural life.

The style is indeed a reflection not only of the physical subject-matter, but also of the attitude of the author. By recalling the phraseology of past writers on rural themes (Goldsmith, Gray, Wordsworth), the poet indicates her fundamental conservatism of attitude. The general ideological effect of the entire poem is to glorify the agricultural scene in England, not only because it is beautiful and because the spectacle of human toil on the land is profoundly moving by its very nature, but also because the poet tends to the conservative, even backward-looking political attitudes that are supposed to result from the rural environment. (The history of many peasant uprisings would refute this conclusion; but that is another matter.) A style that is of itself appropriate for the discussion of a given theme is here deflected towards reactionary ends in the total effect, although there is no essential reason why appeals to the past must necessarily perform such a function. This whole problem, however, goes beyond the mere correlation of techniques to

materials, and anticipates the question of ideology. So far as the specific quoted passage is concerned, sound and sense are very successfully allied.

Another attempt at such alliance may be tested, for similar values, in an elegy written by Gerard Manley Hopkins on the wreck of the *Deutschland*. Here the poet treated his creative problem on several levels. He was describing actual storm and shipwreck, using physical sounds and rhythms to do so; he was projecting human pity and horror at the catastrophe, using images and words heightened by emotional effects in the same sounds and rhythms; finally he was struggling with a problem of ideology (expressed in theological terms), since the presence of a group of nuns among the lost passengers confronted him afresh with the old dilemmas about divine omnipotence, providence, and determinism. After analysis of the entire poem the reader may judge for himself concerning the fittingness of Hopkins's detailed technique to the general theme. The occasion was favourable for the application of his stylistic devices in words and rhythms. The unexpected placing of strong words, exclamatory interruptions, and abrupt changes in the rhythmical pattern where the sense changes, can be very telling in effect when the shifts correspond to a high point in the feelings aroused. Testing Hopkins's lines for this happy combination of effects will show both his strength and his weakness. 'The Wreck of the *Deutschland*' has many examples of successful combination. On the other hand, the poet, especially in his more experimental, purely descriptive attempts, too often permits the breaking of sound patterns, the distortion of words and accentuations, and the reorganization of sentences to result from habitual mannerism rather than from a feeling directly conveyed. The shorter elegy, 'Felix Randall', attempts less, but attains something closer to perfection in its concordance of means to poetic ends.

Further tests of similar nature may be applied to elegies written by William Butler Yeats, Stephen Vincent Benét, and Allen Tate. All three have chosen political subjects for such

treatment: Yeats writes of those who were killed in Dublin in the Easter Uprising of 1916; Benét, of a burial at the end of the American Civil War, seen in the larger perspective of the decades following it; Tate, likewise of the Confederate dead, contemplated from the viewpoint of today. Yeats has chosen short and fairly regular lines with a rather insistent and rapid beat. The words include some vivid expressions among many that are conversational, ordinary, even banal, contrasting with the refrain: 'A terrible beauty is born.' The question that arises is: Does Yeats reveal a purpose in the insistent, almost jingling rhythms and the choice of vocabulary and images? Are they consonant with his subject? And what of the total effect? The reader may propose his own answers to these questions after analysis of the poem.

So also with the dirge written by Benét for the conclusion of his long narrative *John Brown's Body*. The poet has undertaken a worthy and challenging theme. He is not talking of a single personal interment merely, but of a symbolic burial: the end of a régime, the end of the old, oppressive, slave-owning ruling class in the American South. He has chosen lines of irregular length and rhythm, tied together by parallel constructions and ending in a catalogue. The scheme is 'Bury this . . ., Bury this . . ., Bury this, and with them *a, b, c, d.*' Rhymes are employed frequently, but not according to a rigid pattern. Words and images are chosen to execute a broad picture of the meaning of the Northern victory; the purpose is to show that the end of slave-owning has not solved all problems. There is a warning also that many dangers—such as the temptation towards imperialism—still exist. However, the figures of speech are not clear. Benét calls for the burial of

> The great, slave-driven bark,
> Full-oared upon the dark,
> With gilded figurehead,
> With fetters for the crew
> And spices for the few . . . .

Obviously, this is a slave-ship, symbol of the dead economic system; but the poet surely does not, on the literal plane, wish to demand burial of a ship complete with its helpless, enchained human cargo. But the most successful symbols are those that are valid in abstract and concrete realms simultaneously. The general subject of Benét's lament also becomes confused as he develops it. In trying to show that the Southern way of living was based on agriculture alone, and hence foredoomed to lose the battle with an industrialized North, he becomes uncertain of his viewpoint and speaks almost regretfully of 'The pastoral rebellion of the earth / Against machines . . .' Thus the uncertainty in technique is allied with a measure of uncertainty in intention.

There is, finally, an elegiac ode written by Allen Tate on the Confederate dead in the American Civil War. The poet meditates on a graveyard, using autumnal atmosphere and a refrain of leaves blindly wind-driven to suggest a commentary on the meaning—or lack of meaning—of the scene. The lines are also irregular in length and rhythm, the rhymes are frequent but do not follow a rigid pattern. The verbal effects are acquired by unexpected and transferred epithets, forced juxtapositions, and unusual negatives: the 'twilight uncertainty of an animal', 'immitigable pines', fallen leaves spoken of as nature's 'casual sacrament', 'crazy hemlocks' spoken of as pointing 'with troubled fingers to the silence' in an 'improbable mist of nightfall'. Epithets of this type are used to build up an indirect commentary on the scene. We may assume that the intention is to make a despairing statement about the futility of sacrifice, for this is the answer given to the question 'What shall be done by us, the living?'

> We shall say only the leaves
> Flying, plunge and expire
> We shall say only the leaves whispering
> In the improbable mist of nightfall
> That flies on multiple wing:
> Night is the beginning and the end

And in between the ends of distraction
Waits mute speculation, the patient curse
That stones [5] the eye, or like the jaguar leaps
For his own image in a jungle pool, his victim.[6]

The initial critical question is: Does the technique of yoking incommensurate terms together serve the negative purpose of the poem fittingly? We may concede that it does. (We are not at this point discussing the purpose itself.) The next question is: Does the persistent use of this one technical device negate its own purpose and obtrude itself upon us so insistently that the message of the poem is obscured under a burden of stylistic trappings? The answer in this instance is that a basically appropriate device has in fact been made discordant by over-use. We have learnt, then, that when poetic technique is most concordant with its theme, it must not distract attention from it but must remain subordinate to it. And the images are properly expected to elucidate the theme, as the dual figure of petrifying speculation and leaping jaguar does not quite succeed in doing.

Certain other elementary tests are implicit, therefore, in those just suggested. We demand not only the unity of effect for a unified theme—that is, a concordance of means and ends consistently maintained—but we also demand that the unity shall contain a certain diversity within itself. A device may be appropriate, but if it is overdone it may defeat itself. This explains the weakness alike of Gerard Manly Hopkins at his poorest, the self-frustration of the Tate ode, and of others in which single mannerisms obscure the main intention.

The relation of parts of the whole should, in other words, show *diversity* as well as *unity*. Consistency of the smaller units in a pattern may become a vice if it is made monotonous. The ordering of parts also involves certain principles of balance. If a subject is prepared through a long preliminary announcement, balance requires that the statement proper and the conclusion shall not be hasty and perfunctory. A too rapid conclusion creates anticlimax and a sense of disappointment, because it

indicates that the objective of the entire statement did not warrant the preparations for it. Conversely, the neglect of preliminaries, the over-rapid plunge into the heart of a theme, may create confusion and a sense of breathlessness. Nevertheless, it must be granted that both beginnings and endings may be cut short when a discernible purpose is served by the truncation. We have seen an example of purposeful brevity in the conclusion of Hart Crane's elegy, quoted in Chapter III ('The tarantula rattling . . .'). Here again, the essential query is: Does the abbreviation fit into a perceptible purpose? Does it create strain (if it leaves us confused and cheated) or a sense of ease (if we have been made confident of the poet's mastery of a clear intention). When the answers are satisfactory, it may be assumed that the imbalance of parts has been justified.

Direction and cumulation of effects have to do with the objective of a poem. Actually, one cannot separate this final test from any of the preceding ones. The general intention is the major value to which we relate the other values such as ease, harmony, appropriateness, unity, diversity, and the satisfying arrangement of parts. That general intention conditions the judgment of details, since they and it are inseparably related in a single whole. Total message and details of expression are united in what may be called a dialectical unity of art.

At the same time, it must be stressed here—as it is often stressed in relation to prose narrative—that 'intention' and 'message' in poetry are not identical with subject-matter. Elegies, as we have seen, can treat commemoration of the dead in many ways, to convey many different effects—often implicit rather than specifically stated. The poet indicates by many clues what effects he wishes to convey. These are deduced by us and subsumed as his intention. The effectiveness of its expression depends in large part upon the technical problems we have just been reviewing.

The intention of an individual poem is connected in turn with the broadest problem of all: the complex of a writer's beliefs and

attitudes, which spring from his relation to society and in turn determine his relation to it. This socially conditioned manner of thinking on a theoretical level is called his ideology.[7] With poets especially, the ideology may be concealed behind statements that on first sight appear to be quite neutral in character. It may be implicit rather than explicit, unconsciously rather than consciously expressed, but it is there to be detected in either case. The expression of ideology brings us back to the problem of the poet in relation to society as it was sketched in the first chapter. It is time to return to it now, for we have to consider at this point the announced intentions and the ideological content of poetry being written in the English language today.

CHAPTER IV: NOTES

1. Elder Olson, *The Poetry of Dylan Thomas*. University of Chicago, 1954.

1a. Like Nietzsche, for instance, in his *Geburt der Tragödie*.

2. Sidney Finkelstein, *Art and Society*. New York: International Publishers, 1947.

3. For an elucidation of the poem, see notes to it by Eda Lou Walton in *This Generation*, pp. 599 f. For the section here quoted she suggests this paraphrase: 'The night sings of mystery, and anoints with innocence, despite the fact that perjuries (lies against beauty, or the realities of this industrial scene) have galvanized (plated with metal) the eyes and blinded them to true beauty'. For the lines beginning 'worms' inaudible whistle', she points out, 'two ideas are associated—the idea of worms tunnelling through the soil toward light, and the idea of underground trains running between different sections of the mill'.

4. The harshness depends largely on the juxtaposition of a set of stressed syllables, with few unstressed ones to break the series. Out of the nine monosyllabic words constituting the line only three (*in, he, the*) are unstressed.

5. An example of grammatical shift: the noun *stone*, used as a verb, has the special meaning 'to petrify, make like stone'.

6. The noun *victim* is in apposition with *image*.

7. The broad dictionary definition of this term is: 'Manner or content of thinking characteristic of an individual or class'. Marxist philosophy applies the definition in a special fashion, to show how the class origins of an ideology cause it to give a distorted picture of objective reality.

CHAPTER V

INTENTIONS AND IDEOLOGIES

An investigation of techniques in poetry has led us, step by step, to the problem of intentions in poetic composition. Latterly, in dealing with larger aspects of technique, it has been more and more difficult to ignore the central purpose of the poetry being written today. Devices and mannerisms inevitably suggest the query: Whom is the poet addressing, and what is his reason for doing so?

As a first step towards elucidating the general problem, it will be useful to examine briefly what some contemporary critics have had to say on the subject. Their remarks are the more significant because many of the writers are also poets, at least by way of avocation.

The reigning critics and poet-critics today are agreed that poets are very important people. Writers of verse are said to be so important, in fact, that they are sometimes assumed to have all sorts of exemptions and immunities, including the exemption from social responsibility for the effect of their words. This, it may be remarked at once, is a reverse of the attitude typical of a pre-literate age, when epic and primitive religious verse forms were cultivated. Then poets were considered to be important precisely because they operated within a very definite sphere of social responsibility, recognized alike by themselves and by their tribal world.

Among the contemporary American writers known as the 'New Critics' (so called, it would appear, because their doctrines are actually quite old), the negation of responsibility is justified by appeals to the idealist philosophy of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834), which was indebted to that of Kant and Schelling

in Germany. Now Coleridge, as is well known, thought of poetic imagination at its best—the 'primary imagination' [1]—as generically similar to the absolute creative consciousness, designated by him as the 'I AM,' which idealists assume to have pre-existed matter. Inferior to this primary imagination was, according to him, a secondary type of the same thing, and also the faculty of mere fancy; that is, the humbler ability to combine data of memory in non-original patterns, by association of ideas. But the great ones share qualitatively, though on an ordinary, finite level, in the 'eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM', as Coleridge put it, with a characteristic metaphysical flourish.

This is heady doctrine for any poet to hear about himself. As reformulated today by Coleridge's admirer Allen Tate, it becomes an argument that poetry in general can claim to be absolute, in the sense of being *absolved* from responsibilities. If poets are so near to divinity, they must be a law unto themselves. (Tate and his colleagues tend to forget Coleridge's distinction between primary and secondary imagination; between the few great and the many mediocre poets who are their unoriginal echoes.) The truth of poetic experience, Tate insists, is not only different from the truths of science, but it is also transcendentally on a higher plane and vastly superior.[2] Any attempt at programmatic statements in poetry is unworthy and inappropriate. They are to be rejected with especial vehemence if they concern Mr. Tate's pet aversion, 'the social sciences'. In fact, the poet is said to be so lofty, so much the seer or prophet, that he is told not to attempt to communicate at all on subjects of social import. Writing about a poem by Edna Millay on the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti—a weak, inadequate poem, it is true—Tate jeers at the intention, pretends not to understand the quite obvious symbolism employed, and arrives at the amazing conclusion: 'I am attacking here the fallacy of communication in poetry.' [3]

Curiously, then, the poet—who was initially hailed in idealist terms as closely akin to an absolute and primal intelligence—is

finally disqualified from saying anything that can have communicable sense to other persons. It is surely no accident that he is bidden to keep silent specifically on such issues as the Sacco and Vanzetti case. In the historic ages where poets were actually thought of as seers, they did not hold their tongues nor did they regard communication as alien to their craft.

Another American poet-critic has gone still further than Tate in abjuring the requirement of communicability for poetry. In an essay called 'A Farewell to Criticism', Karl Shapiro frankly affirms that poetry is completely solipsistic.[4] The 'word' of ordinary language, which has a 'communicable sense', becomes the 'non-word' of poetry, having no such sense at all! 'It is my contention that the 'same' word used in a prose line and in a line of poetry are *two entirely different words*, not even similar, except to the eye' (my italics). Shapiro concludes: 'a poem is a literary construct composed of not-words which, in their retreat from meanings, arrive at a prosodic sense-beyond-sense. The aim of a poem is not known.' Nor are any standards known: 'A good poem can be known from a bad poem only by instinct and the practise of reading poems' (a meaningless statement). No pronouncement on the nature and role of poetry could be more irresponsible and anti-social than this.[5]

In England, too, one now finds a widespread tendency to disavow any closeness of interrelation between poet and society. The influence of German idealism by way of Coleridge is a strong factor here also,[6] and the poet is likewise regarded by many English writers as a privileged being exempt from responsibility, but they announce his self-sufficiency and isolation somewhat less stridently. A number of former progressives and leftists have publicly expressed repentance for their activities and writings in the nineteen-thirties, when closeness to the community and a lively sense of responsibility were accepted literary attitudes. They have explained their new attitudes by what they call 'disillusion' in various forms. Other poets have simply adhered consistently to an attitude of aloofness. Edith Sitwell has expressed indignation at the thought that poets are under an

'obligation' to express the contemporary scene, and at the thought that a poet 'need only be concerned with left politics, the housing problem or Marx's work in order to become automatically great.'[7] One wonders from what source she derived so fantastic a thesis. She apparently concludes that indifference to these issues is a surer road to greatness.

The immediate answer to Dame Edith Sitwell's disingenuous protest is, of course, obvious. No one obliges a poet to write about the contemporary scene, nor any one aspect of it. No one compels him to avoid remote or past themes, and of course no one ever claimed that a concern with any philosophical doctrine can 'automatically' produce a great writer. But these are still minor errors, scarcely worthy of refutation.

The main problem is much larger. It has to do with the position of poetry in the present historical situation, at a time when most of its expositors and practitioners make a principle of restricting it and holding it aloof from the public,[8] as the prerogative of a very exclusive few. Even today, of course, this attitude is by no means universal, but we shall for the moment defer consideration of the honourable exceptions to it.

What this entire school represents is a revival of the old-fashioned doctrine of art for art's sake—a different way of saying art for an oligarchy's sake—dressed in Coleridgean and other philosophical tags. The latter are often a disguise for political timidity. The cause is not far to seek. There is a pervasive insecurity vexing those who benefit most from economic domination of the capitalist world today. Those who wield power, alarmed at prospects of future crises and possible revolutionary upsurge in the wake of war, have been exerting many types of pressure in order to win writers and thinkers over to a support of the *status quo*. In America the pressures have been very drastic, and intellectuals have been among the most conspicuous victims to suffer from them. An atmosphere of timidity has been engendered as a result, and most of yesterday's 'Left' poets have adopted a policy of retreat, not only in America, but in other

parts of the English-speaking world. They now pretend that they had been led to expect utopian conditions in their own lifetime, and since these and other expectations have been disappointed, the writers were justified in throwing up the whole job:

> We hoped; we waited for the day
> The state would wither clean away,
> Expecting the Millennium
> That theory promised us would come.
> It didn't,—

cries Auden in his 'New Year's Letter' dated January 1, 1940.

Such lines are open to serious charges of ignorance or else of bad faith on the part of the author. They indicate that the fashionable Left poets of the nineteen-thirties, Auden and his friends, actually understood nothing of the self-proclaimed 'revolutionary' thinking with which they then tried to colour their work. Having more recently turned their backs on public responsibilities, and disavowed any concern for public themes, they have found themselves cast back upon the realm of the ego, and even there they have chosen that form of inner discourse which most effectively conceals its inescapable social aspects. Hence the vogue of dream materials, arbitrarily chosen images, and surrealist techniques. The poet frightened by social responsibility flatters himself that he has found a domain of private freedom when he engages himself with these materials, but he is really substituting an illusion of freedom for the genuine state, which has a quite opposite character.[9]

In aesthetics, the organization of experience in terms of beauty (including the principles just discussed in Chapter IV) is as much a co-operative act as is modern scientific research. Both are public and social. Both impose stringent requirements of discipline and responsibility.

The illustrations for these remarks will be found in many of the lyrical passages previously quoted in connection with various aspects of technique. There is no need to reintroduce them here. We have seen, in connection with surrealist lyricism, how the

literary immersion in myths of the subconscious means subjection to the tyranny of unchanging 'racial' patterns deterministically repeating themselves. Examples are to be found in much contemporary prose as well as verse.

Besides the dream world, two other areas have been cultivated assiduously by poets renouncing or at least avoiding the kind of social responsibility that was rather generally admitted among creative artists in the nineteen-thirties. These are religious experience and destructive satire. Both require social attitudes of some sort; but poets in retreat have turned to both areas with precocupations that are primarily subjective. Many have not forgotten the experiences of economic depression and anti-fascist struggle, of unemployment followed by war. But since they now divorce these unobliterated memories from active communal struggle today, they are prone to develop an exaggerated sense of guilt interpreted in purely personal terms. Thus Robert Lowell, for instance, a New England poet converted recently to Catholicism, rather incongruously expresses his break with tradition through a Freudian image of parricide as an act freeing him for adult independence:

> But the world spread [i.e. expanded]
> When the clubbed flintlock broke my father's brain.

Religious writing need not be thus oriented towards the subjective in an egocentric, anti-social sense. In fact, the best of earlier religious poetry has not been so oriented. The great religious writings of all the world are cherished by wide circles of humanity (including non-believers) in so far as they explore not only the self-centred, purely subjective desire of individuals to lean on some form of supernatural support, but also that complementary sense of oneness with humanity which is called the love of man. Among the mystics, those figures most widely revered and loved—like St. Francis of Assissi—blended personal religious experience with a lively sense of kinship with the suffering mortals around them. Dante's religious writings are, of

course, infused from start to finish with a strong sense of social responsibility. The author of the English visionary satire *Piers Plowman* was actuated throughout by social motives, for though mystical in his ultimate outlook, he was primarily moved to expression by the misery, oppression, and brutalization of the common folk, together with the corruption of the ruling class, which he saw in fourteenth-century England.

Thus the problem of writing religious poetry is simply another aspect of the one already defined in relation to the lyric. It is the problem of interpenetrating personal and subjective experience with the demands of social responsibility, through lively awareness of the living humanity surrounding us. If he is religious, the poet makes use of certain transcendental postulates concerning man's relation to the universe to which a materialist cannot assent, but the latter can accept and share in the fundamental poetic experience, which he can very well reinterpret in his own terms.

As with the lyric pure and simple, then, most writers of modern religious poetry have concentrated on the internal aspect at the expense of the communal. But not all. George Barker has put his religious feeling in the service of progressive social criticism. He has in fact drawn on the mediaeval tradition of *Piers Plowman* in order to express his horror at the political course being taken by England on the eve of 1939. The Irish poet Denis Devlin combines religious and social feeling in some of his most effective poetry. In his 'Bacchanal' he describes the forerunners of a new day, bearing the hopes of oppressed humanity, under the figure of sprinting messengers who carry news to a fleet of ships, bidding them go forward to a free and joyous life:

> They have never eaten nor drunk nor slept their fill, and have no quick-wit means,
> Only envy learnt in feeding the shut fist pistoned right machines.
> Canaille, canaille, what red horizons of anger for humbled lives lie
> Tumbled up in the old times, the long-fermenting now, canaille! . . .

And putrescent tenements breed their vermin, tearing holes in occasional rags,
Fume from sour mouths of windows, whimper on senile quicksand legs,
Raucous the air and barb-tongued seasoned with tunes from slit-eyed bars,
Where, living on credit on blabbin pints, the anger of boozy cities stares . . .
How shall we suffer the little children to come unto us, how shall we pay
For the ranged amorphous faces grey as the creased skies this guttering day . . .?

In such writing, the vivid and original language is strengthened by the religious feeling for man's brotherhood and man's accountability for his fellow's misery. At the other extreme we have an alliance of religion with a social attitude quite contradictory to the idea of human brotherhood. The South African poet, Roy Campbell, incongruously combines his attitude of racial contempt and cynical demagogy with appeals to religion (specifically Catholicism). Those appeals are a perversion of all positive values to which religion can lay claim.

The work of T. S. Eliot represents two treatments of religion in poetry: both the ego-centred and the socially directed. In the former, Eliot's personal meditations explore the meaning, for the individual soul, of the mystical paradoxes flowing from the Christian concept of infinity incarnate in finite mortality. From the time of the Latin and Greek church fathers, this theme has lent itself to fanciful treatment in the form of rhetorical paradoxes. Eliot's literary embroideries on it range from the coldly intellectual, as if a mind at work on mathematical or linguistic exercises, to occasional recordings of personal experience in quite forceful imagery. Throughout, however, the tone is one of detachment, alien alike to mystical rapture and to fraternal love.

The technique of literary paradox applied to religion is exemplified in both *Ash-Wednesday* and *Four Quartets*. There is prosy paradox, as here:

If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.

There is frostily ingenious metaphor, like the comparison of divine absolute being—Dante's 'unmoved mover'—to the quiet centre of a rotating sphere whence springs the 'dance' of phenomena:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. . . .

. . . Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.

All of this is very consciously literary, and it quite fails to warm the heart. As is so often true with Eliot, the expression is best where it is most derivative, as in this echo of Dante's *l'amor che move il sole* . . .:

Desire itself is movement
Not in itself desirable;
Love is itself unmoving,
Only the cause and end of movement . . .

Eliot's nostalgia for an imagined unmoving absolute is traceable to his inability to reconcile himself to the central facts of age and death, of which he has always strongly disapproved. He sees change as a worsening, never as an improvement, and he clothes his fears of it in theological language. You will scan his entire poetic output in vain for a glimmering hope that time may be made to serve human self-improvement if men learn to use it by recognizing its function in the conquest of nature and themselves. For Eliot time's course means loss and futility only:

And the way up is the way down, the way forward is the way back.
You cannot face it steadily, but this thing is sure,
That time is no healer: the patient is no longer here.
When the train starts, and the passengers are settled
To fruit, periodicals and business letters . . .
Their faces relax from grief into relief . . .
Fare forward, travellers! not escaping from the past
Into different lives, or into any future;
You are not the same people who left that station
Or who will arrive at any terminus,
While the narrowing rails slide together behind you. . . .

This futile rebellion against one of the necessities of our being is less a sign of religious feeling than of psychological maladjustment.

So dreary an outlook as this on change, so obstinate a concentration on its negative aspects, causes Eliot to be preoccupied with man's unworthiness and guilt, to the exclusion of his nobility and creative courage. Where courage and worth are presented, as in *Murder in the Cathedral*, the focus of interest is still egocentric. The hero's martyrdom is analysed, not to show how it was actuated by positive love of God and man, but to show how Thomas resisted the temptation to be martyred for the *wrong* reason—spiritual pride. The chorus, representing ordinary people who are onlookers, remains passively concerned with the futilities of time and change. The saint is not related to the community about him: he is an aristocrat, and they are of a different and lower order.

These charges are not, however, the most serious to be levelled against the poetry by Eliot that claims to be religious. Its defects are worse than merely negative. It has been used recently in order to advance a point of view that by implication is quite the opposite of Christian. In the verse drama *The Cocktail Party*, despite all its talk of martyrdom, spiritual values, and redemption, what emerges is an attitude of contempt for races that are called hopelessly 'backward' by sophisticated exponents of imperialism.

Quite apart from the attitudes inherent in the play, there is a disturbing incongruence between the characters of the *dramatis personae* and their symbolic functions in the allegorical pattern. A fashionable psychiatrist-about-town is suddenly revealed as a figure representing God; a maliciously gossiping matron associated with him is a sort of high priestess of his (the Church?); and a disillusioned young woman recently jilted by her married lover is endowed with the makings of a Christian martyr. She fulfils her destiny, indeed, by joining a religious order and being done to death, quite horribly, by tribesmen in a remote part of the Empire. The heart of the matter is the tone adopted towards the perpetrators of her death. These primitive natives are described with a kind of jesting contempt as invincibly barbarous. All that is deplored is the inability of the British imperial government to use sterner measures against these childish rebels. Thus the incident becomes in effect a justification for policies of racial domination.

But oppressive superiority towards undeveloped peoples is surely an attitude quite out of keeping with the universalist and fraternal doctrines of Christianity. One does not need to accept the dogmas of revealed Christian religion to perceive that the outstanding historical merit of this faith—as opposed to many of the narrow tribal cults preceding it—has been its concern for all members of the human race as spiritual equals; its insistence on their essential brotherhood; its orientation of values towards the virtues of the lowly and obscure folk of the earth. In contrast it must be said that Mr. Eliot's cult appears to be rather anti-Christian. Certain traits of his earlier work had already pointed in the same direction—his contempt for simple people, his burlesque of their language, his sneering at Jews, and his demagogy in attacking the commercialism of a system he actually defends. These traits are familiar elements in fascist or near-fascist thinking. They do not foster the kind of literature that humanity will cherish long and gratefully.[10]

Satire in verse may be criticized for some of the same vices that beset attempts at religious poetry today. It too is often an

elaborate cover for a retreat from combat. Unlike the militant, progressive satire engendered by the bourgeois struggles of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, most contemporary English satire now resists change. It calls attention to surface symptoms of a disease, and then evades their consequences, or else advocates reactionary solutions. The evasion, as in the case of much religious poetry, may take the form of subjective analyses as a substitute for dealing with external conflicts. Or it may take the form of an acrimonious rejection of all human values as unworthy of a struggle for preservation. Either attitude appears to absolve the poet from responsible use of his talent.

Evasive satire is well exemplified in the verse play by Auden and Isherwood, *The Ascent of F* 6. It begins with a valid, if relatively impotent, attack on imperialism. The topic is the race of English climbers to outstrip foreign competitors in reaching the top of a mountain, F 6, important for English interests in a colonial area. The British public is shown listening to reports on this race as to a sporting event, which attracts their attention equally with a daily catalogue of murders and similar calamities. The nationalisms of the competing claimants to the mountain are duly ridiculed. Thus the satiric subject is well launched. But suddenly our interest is shifted to the purely subjective realm; the climbing of the mountain becomes a psychological symbol for the rivalry between two brothers for their mother's favour; the mountain ceases to be an imperialist symbol and becomes a sexual one; and the outcome of the struggle is the murder of one brother by the other for quite private reasons. By substituting Freudianism for political issues in mid-course, the authors are able to escape from an obligation to draw deductions from the theme first presented.

The satiric writings of Auden since the latter nineteen-thirties follow this general pattern of retreat. In his 'Letter to Lord Byron' Auden imitates the verse form and mannerisms of a great predecessor, but whereas Byron turned his satire against institutions and class pretensions, dealing with personal

human foibles in relation to these, Auden merely gives us an ego-centred autobiography adorned with harmless jibes at unimportant things. His *Age of Anxiety* treats of the period of the Second World War, but it shows us only personal neuroses instead of touching on any of the great issues of the time.

At its worst, modern verse satire takes the form of malevolent anti-humanism. The most glaring instance is the poetry by the American, Ezra Pound. It is put together with many quotations from literary classics, both familiar and obscure, in numerous languages. The technical effect is, as we have seen, to challenge attention by startling juxtapositions, always pejorative for the modern, always laudatory for the past. The total effect today extends far beyond mere nostalgia for vanished cultures. It now amounts to propaganda for fascism. *Pisan Cantos* advances Hitler's blood-thirsty and demagogic denunciations of 'Jewish' bankers as originators of war:

> the yidd is a stimulant, and the goyim are cattle
> in gt/ proportion and go to saleable slaughter
> with the maximum of docility . . .
> And the two largest rackets are the alternation of the value of money. . . .
> and usury 60% or lending that which is made out of nothing. . . .

The same idea is expressed in the polyglot style affected by Pound:

> po'eri di'aoli
> po'eri di'aoli sent to the slaughter
> Knecht gegen Knecht
> to the sound of the bumm drum, to eat remnants for
> a usurer's holiday to change the
> price of a currency. . . .

Similarly, Pound's satiric denunciations of the British in India are a cover to justify the imperialist adventure of Mussolini in Africa, but never a critique of imperialism as a whole; never of a *system* that produces this inhuman exploitation. He vilifies, by his technique of juxtaposition, omission, and dis-

tortion, all struggles for national freedom and independence. And while he denigrates humanity, in language that is often downright revolting, he has the temerity to compare himself with some of the grandest figures produced by human imagination in myth, art, and history: personages like Odysseus, Aeneas, the Priest of Nemi (from Frazer's *Golden Bough*), and even Jesus Christ.[11]

Indeed, it must be admitted that, as far as numbers and bulk of output are concerned, a very large part of the poetic composition in English today is done by indifferent, reactionary, and even clinically unhealthy writers. The experiments in technique, the innovations in form, often provide a certain stimulus to the reader's intellect and aesthetic sensibilities, but the message is dust and ashes—or worse still, corroding poison. The question may properly be asked at this point: Is there no justified use of experimental techniques today? And are there no poets worthily using language and technique, as the social function of poetic communication demands that they should be used?

The answer to both questions is affirmative.

First as to the language. Nothing that has been said thus far is intended to imply that all poetry has an obligation to be written in one prescribed style, necessarily a simple one. One prime aesthetic requirement is, as we have seen, a consonance of style and substance. Complex thought is often best clothed in complex linguistic structures. And in the type of expression that calls for an idiom of noble simplicity, there is very fine work already achieved. In the United States primarily, but also in other parts of the English-speaking world and even beyond, across the barriers of language, this work has been strongly and beneficially affected by the tradition of Walt Whitman. For in Whitman the straightforward language and the long, irregular lines and the rhythms of unstudied speech were allied to great affirmations evoking universal responses. And the technique, be it noted, was considered experimental in a truly revolutionary sense at the time when Whitman was writing. His theory and

practice were not merely a return to the language of the people in the sense of unoriginal imitation. He did not produce merely literary exercises in imitation of ballads and folk-song, though this too has been done by very distinguished poets, past and present, with pleasure and profit to themselves and their readers.

What Whitman did was to open his ear to the rhythms of speech about him, just as he opened his eyes to the physical vistas of America, with a fresh awareness of their significance. He transmuted the diction into something that was loftier than, and yet clearly akin to, ordinary speech, something that was the appropriate vehicle for what he had to say. Of course there was danger in his style: the danger of mannerism, exaggeration, and inappropriate use, to which he sometimes succumbed. But his achievement was great because of the alliance of a broad, self-discovered technique to themes of like scope and newness. His influence on later poets has been at least as great as his personal achievement. His school today may be called the humane school of poetry, in contrast to the anti-humanism of Pound, Eliot, and the others who lower humanity through a verse medium.

Among the representatives of the humanist school, none recently writing English poetry shows the effect of Whitman's example more clearly than Carl Sandburg. In *The People, Yes* there is a treasury of popular speech woven into a tissue of democratic poetic statement, of uneven merit but great imaginative appeal. It contains humour and satire, suffering and despair and sharp warning to oppressors, all lit up by the vast anonymous wisdom of the people that is expressed by proverb and anecdote, wise-crack and cliché and the sudden flash of insight:

> The people have the say-so
> Let the argument go on.
> Let the people listen.
> Tomorrow the people will say Yes or No by one question:
> 'What else can be done?'
> In the drive of faiths on the wind today the people know:
> 'We have come far and we are going farther yet.' . . .

'The people,' said a farmer's wife in a Minnesota country
store
while her husband was buying a new post-hole digger,
'The people,' she went on, 'will stick around a long time,
'The people run the works, only they don't know it yet—you
wait and see.'

But the criticism that may be levelled against Sandburg, even at his best, even when he most creatively embodies what he has learned from the use of popular speech and wisdom, is that what he says does not rise. He lays down his images and his sayings in a row, and the last is as good as the first, but no better. The raw materials are not built up to a climax. His flatness of effect is in turn traceable to his passive conception of the very people he glorifies. They listen, they suffer; but their revolt is indefinitely postponed.

The same may be said of other writers, whether heirs of Whitman or not, who have been cultivating the idiom of simple language as a source of fresh poetic life and vigour. The problem is deeper than a mere refreshment of style. It concerns the union of style with ideology. Sandburg is a true democrat in the tradition of Abraham Lincoln, whom he so much admires, and he would no doubt wish to advance that tradition today. But to be a living democrat in our times, and to contribute to the democratic tradition, means to face certain problems that have become far more critical and precisely defined than they were in the mid-nineteenth century. It is no longer enough to exclaim over the breadth of democratic vistas, the power of the people both in their passive endurance and their potential strength. It is not enough to denounce munitions-makers and bankers in general rhetorical terms, as Sandburg does. The issues of human survival and progress today clamour for more definite, not less definite, purposefulness in writing, if literary expression is to keep pace with the themes that now speak to men's deepest concerns. Here, however, writers of the liberal popular school leave us disappointed. They acclaim humanity and show it on the march, but they leave us with indeterminate questions instead

of new affirmations. Sandburg concludes *The People, Yes* with an unhelpful query:

> In the darkness with a great bundle of grief the people march.
> In the night, and overhead a shovel of stars for keeps, the people march:
> 'Where to? What next?'

and no inkling of an answer.

There are many younger writers today, on the other hand, who not only cultivate a language close to popular speech, but also labour very seriously to convey a stronger sense of purposeful direction than Sandburg manifests. The work of these young men and women is to be found in Left-wing literary journals almost exclusively; the conventional publications are now taken over for the most part by formalists: exponents of an esoteric matter dealing complicatedly with empty themes. The Left writers in English, for their part, are still wrestling with the problem of evolving a technique that befits their vision. The others have a formalistic technique without worthy content. It remains for worthy content to find techniques fitting to itself. Here and there one can hear the note of poetic renaissance clearly announced, as valid inspiration acquires linguistic discipline.

The problem of language still challenges those who are schooling themselves towards a mastery of their medium in the service of a broad and humane art, able to appeal simultaneously to a wide public and to specially equipped critics and colleagues. It may be said that contemporary English does not offer an example such as that set by poets of world stature like Pablo Neruda, V. Mayakovsky, Julian Tuwim, and Louis Aragon, who combine great mastery of technique with the kind of vision that should be allied to it. In reading the work of these poets one obtains a sense, too often missing with the most sincere of the English humane school, that worthy sentiments are fittingly combined with an idiom of unhackneyed freshness. The mastery of such language as theirs requires apprenticeship like any other skill. It requires much labour devoted to *études*

that will make familiar the resources available in sound and rhythm, vocabulary, images, and structure: the topics here surveyed in relation to technique.[12]

Formalists too advocate meticulous attention to technical exercises, but they fail to go beyond them. They end where they began, giving us ingenious creations with a predominantly negative message. Seldom do they evolve towards the production of something that, as Milton expressed it, mankind will not willingly let die.

For an example of promising experimentation—an attempt to relate fresh technique with worthy substance—we may take Dalton Trumbo's biting poem, 'Portrait of the Artist as a Middle-Aged Man'. This deals with the pilgrimage of an informer to Washington to testify before a Congressional Committee investigating 'un-American' activities. On the physical level, the verse rhythm with increasing speed suggests the clickety-clack of the train speeding through the night, but also the growing nervous tension of the traveller confronting a task which even he finds distasteful:

> Pullman berth
> (long dark, long dark)
> Pullman berth on a Washington train
> (long-dark-blue-black night) . . .
> Springtime rain
> (long dark, long dark)
> Springtime rain with the shade drawn tight
> (long-dark-blue-black night).

Sense impressions are evoked, not for their own sakes (as in pure impressionism) but to contribute to a clearly defined end. The forms and types of diction change. Fragments of the halting testimony appear, interwoven with reminiscent fragments from a Nazi firm's correspondence on the profitable use of human cadavers in soap-making. There are headlines from newspapers modified into the rhythm of the home journey, a passing vision of Washington's ghost army, which suffered its worst winter at Valley Forge, not far from the speeding train,

and finally an interior monologue by the isolated betrayer, phrased like a prayer:

> Let me not find myself in these maturer years
> Moving through deserted streets alone
> In the heart of a city vanquished and betrayed
>
> Let me not innocently round
> Some unexpected corner then
> And stumble, not on stones, but air
>
> With nothing in my ears but the wind rushing up
> And I sedately falling endlessly
> Clutching the cool unencompassed void in fright
> The long void
> The dark void
> And the long dark blue black night

If the reader feels that still greater eloquence should have been evoked by such a theme, he is at least satisfied that technique and ideological intention have here been well combined.

In this respect Pablo Neruda's work may well provide inspiration to the English-speaking world, especially to the poets of the United States. Neruda is especially close to North America because of his themes, his debt to Whitman and to Abraham Lincoln, and his broad and deep understanding of the people: their needs, sufferings, and great traditions.

The English text of Neruda's *Let the Rail-Splitter Awake* reveals the poet's skill in some of the techniques we have surveyed: the juxtaposition of abstract and concrete terms, the use of vivifying epithets and symbolic images, the structured sentences that contain parallels and balanced elements and rhythms of their own, patterned on current speech yet greatly heightened in effect.

Above all, Neruda gives that sense of culmination, of going somewhere, which is generally lacking in Sandburg and even in Whitman. Both of these appear to strain and grow breathless as they catalogue the items embraced in their visions. Neruda's endings are almost always satisfactorily climactic. The poem

'Song for Bolivar' gives an example in miniature. It begins with an invocation, having overtones of the Lord's Prayer, which states the universal presence of this heroic liberator in terms, first, of the physical beauty and abundance of South America:

> Our father who art in earth,
> in the water, in the air
> of all our wide and silent latitude,
> everything bears your name, father, in our domain.

Neruda proceeds easily from the natural bounty of that domain —the sugar-cane and the tin, the mountains and sea and snow and the people at work—to a vision of human beings with clasped hands, animated by the determination to repeat in our day the struggles of liberation known to Bolivar. He sees that they are forms of one and the same struggle, no matter where they occur. Thus the vision becomes wider, and then is suddenly made specific in a conclusion where the abstract truth and the concrete image are united with effective finality:

> I met Bolivar one fine long morning
> in Madrid, in the mouth of the Fifth Regiment.
> Father, I said, are you or are you not, or who are you?
> And looking towards the Cuartel de la Montana, he said,
> I wake up every hundred years when the people awaken.

Verses like this show how poet and audience can meet again as they met in past ages.

In contrast with such writers, many conventional English-speaking poets today are subject to a most serious charge. They have for the most part put their considerable potential talents into the service of anti-human reaction and in so doing have frustrated them. Such members of the public as they reach are disarmed and enfeebled, not strengthened for the enormously decisive struggle going on in the world today between corruption and death on the one hand and life and progress on the other. At such a moment it is futile to make elaborate distinctions between those who consciously corrupt—for instance, Kenneth Patchen in America, who applies verbal skill more and

more frequently to pornographic themes—and those who simply follow snobbish modes unreflectingly.

In the atmosphere of their inverted values, it is possible to present aggression as defence, imperialism as a championship of democracy, and witch-hunting as protection of the freedom and dignity of man. The nightmare quality of art is a reflection of the *cauchemar* of daily social life. The art not only reflects a condition but also serves to aggravate it.

For poets, like other citizens, are humans, and that means that they act upon an environment ideologically, besides being acted upon by it. They are agents capable of making choice; they frequently possess more knowledge of past human culture than those they address; the choices they make are replete with social consequences. In the light of these consequences, the predominant school of English-speaking poets may be charged with faults that affect them both as human beings and as artists.

They have elaborated virtuoso skills and then vitiated them in sterile exercises or perverted them to anti-human ends.

They have helped to poison the community mind with fantasies of irresponsible experience, substituting the anarchy of dream life for the disciplined order and accountability of human group living.

They have devoted themselves to a selfish exploration of private egos, instead of enriching individuals through the enrichment of community culture.

They have proclaimed an arrogant contempt for their fellows, which has tended to bring literary art itself into disrepute among ordinary people.

They have raised the slogan of anarchist freedom and bohemianism as a pretext for rejecting admonitions about the responsibility of art today. They have closed their ears to the needs of humanity in travail, only to join actively in the choruses of hate and war at the bidding of their chosen masters.

These are serious charges, and they imply a most serious guilt. In a certain sense, the poets concerned are quite willing to admit guilt. In fact, feelings of personal guilt have become with

them, as has been pointed out, a valuable item of trade. But their admission of guilt is, actually, a form of individual self-indulgence. We have had enough and too much of the breast-beating which says: 'I am a sinful creature, *and therefore* all I can do is to enact private penance while the fascists and imperialists undertake human extinction. Meantime, I shall experiment with vowel harmonies and verbal juxtapositions.'

No; the guilt here designated is broader than the infantile transgressions of individuals. It is guilt in the sphere of social responsibility which is fundamental for art. When that is recognized there is hope for creative results. It is the guilt that Eve Merriam vividly expresses in 'The Climate of Terror', part of the public responsibility of Americans for misdeeds perpetrated in the name of their country today. Once, says the author, she had hated all Germans, including the little men who pleaded ignorance and helplessness: 'The last meek clerk filing his pallid papers / Who never saw a gas chamber, never fired a gun.' Now she detects symptoms of the same cowardice in herself, the impulse to excuse herself.

> —To the marshallized millions
> By the grace of gold and trumanity
> Starving on a mash of gangster films and Coca-Cola:
> This meal was not of my planning.
>
> —To the women of China, in daylight after blindness,
> Blinking at the nightmare boast:
> 'I dropped the bomb and I would do it again.'
> Understand, I have no access to the White House.
>
> —To the conscience of the world:
> I am not the Chase National Bank
> General Motors nor General MacArthur.

The technical skill here deployed in support of a burning message is not, it must be admitted, as distinguished as its purport. It may be criticized on the score of a number of the tests suggested in the last chapter. The language and sounds and structure lag slightly behind the ardent intention of the author's

trenchant satire. The dissonances (note the feminine near-rhyme in *'trumanity'* and *'planning'*) seems to appear sporadically, not in a designed way. The word play in such pairs as *marshalled*: *marshallizing*, *trumanity*: *humanity*, and *General Motors*: *General MacArthur* is good satire but needs more effective preparation. The conclusion of the poem, which proclaims faith and resolution to fight, also fails to receive the full measure of technical support it deserves. But it does march forward from negative to positive, and it replaces avowal of guilt with avowal of courageous struggle, in full acceptance of social responsibility.

> Behold, with pain with burning with ashes
> The leaf put forth
> And the tiny fisted bud;
> I am fruitful at last,
> I multiply.
>
> The few, the thousandfold
> The strong and the timid (I too am timid)
> Stand our native ground.
>
> From the night of the poor we gather,
> And in the darkness build
> Not waiting for the darkness to lift,
> But pushing it back, rolling the morning in
>
> Taking (for we know it is ours to demand)
> As the solid ground beneath our feet
> Peace
> Taken for granted, natural,
> Peace indivisible and everywhere, unbroken as sunlight.
>
> And go on
> To taller things.

When the high intentions and broad humanities of such writers are matched with the techniques they deserve, poetry in English will be ready to scale new heights of achievement. And in that day we may assume that the poets will again have found their audiences and be creatively identified with them.

CHAPTER V: NOTES

1. *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Shawcross, I. Oxford, 1907, ch. 13, p. 202.

2. Allen Tate, *On the Limits of Poetry*. New York: 1948: 'The aesthetic whole invites indefinitely prolonged attention; whereas the half-statement of science arrests our attention at those features of the whole that may be put to the service of the will', p. 111. (The use of the term *will* in this connection is another example of Kantian idealism adopted by way of Coleridge.)

3. *Ibid.*, p. 77. Of the nineteenth-century efforts to say something about matters taken from the hated 'social sciences', Tate remarks: 'It may scarcely be said that we change this tradition of poetic futility by giving it a new name, Social Poetry'.

4. Karl Shapiro, 'A Farewell to Criticism', *Poetry*, LXXI, January 1948, 196–217. Originally given as a lecture at the University of Chicago.

5. It must be pointed out that some salutary attacks have been levelled at the 'new' school in poetry and criticism, both in the academic scholarly reviews and of course in the left literary press, such as *Science and Society* and *Masses and Mainstream* in America, and *The Modern Quarterly* in England. For a good example of the former, with bibliography, see Elder Olson, 'William Empson, Contemporary Criticism and Poetic Diction', *Modern Philology*, XLVII, 1950, 222–52.

6. Cf. Herbert Read, *Coleridge as Critic*. London, 1947.

7. Introduction to the *Collected Poems* of Sacheverell Sitwell, London: Duckworth, 1936.

8. I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, London, 1945 ed., states that in the course of his work a poet is 'not as a rule deliberately or consciously engaged in a communicative endeavour. . . . Those artists and poets who can be suspected of close separate attention to the communicative aspect tend . . . to fall into a subordinate rank', p. 27. Richards does, however, concede that Shakespeare is an exception to this rule.

9. See Christopher Caudwell, *Illusion and Reality: A Study in the Source of Poetry*. London: Macmillan, 1937, p. 119. The value of some of Caudwell's criticism is lessened by his attempt to combine Marxism with uncritically accepted doctrines out of Freud, and with some very doubtful anthropology. But his negative criticism of modern poetry is quite penetrating.

10. For an exhaustive critique of Eliot on these grounds see R. H. Robbins, *The T. S. Eliot Myth*. New York: Henry Schuman, 1951.

11. For details see the author's article, 'The Anti-Humanism of Ezra Pound', *Science and Society*, XIII, 1949, 258–69. The work of Pound would not deserve extended analysis except for the fact that it is so symptomatic. A committee of well-known fellow poets associated with

the Library of Congress in America decided to award to him the prize for the best volume of poetry to be published in the year when *Pisan Cantos* appeared (1949). In so doing they claimed not only that his explicit fascist ideology was irrelevant, because anything is to be permitted to a versifier, but also that his madness was irrelevant (for Pound officially claimed exemption for his acts of treason in the service of Mussolini, 1941–45, on the plea of insanity at the very time that he was composing *Pisan Cantos*). The flouting of artistic and social responsibility could not be more glaring. The award not only called attention to the artistic degeneration of him who received it, but also to the corruption of standards among those who voted for it.

The list included Conrad Aiken, W.H. Auden, Louise Bogan, Katherine Garrison Chapin, T. S. Eliot, Paul Green, Robert Lowell, Katherine Ann Porter, Karl Shapiro, Allen Tate, Willard Thorp, and Robert Penn Warren. To the credit of American poets and public it must be pointed out that the award was not unanimous, and that it raised a storm of protest, not only from consciously anti-fascist groups and individuals, but also from academic critics who recognized the purely literary grounds for condemning Pound's manner of writing and its total effects.

12. Some of the poets just mentioned served an apprenticeship under unfortunate ideological influences. The early work of some was in part experimental in the manner of formalist aesthetic schools, such as futurism and surrealism, which deny the public values of poetry, and pervert it from its socially responsible objective to opposite goals. This may be said to have been a wasteful form of apprenticeship. Neruda and Aragon have disavowed theirs, and the early work of Mayakovsky has been the subject of a recent critical evaluation in the Soviet Union, distinguishing the influence of revolutionary thinkers from that of futuristic writers upon his work.

PART TWO

Some Special Problems

CHAPTER VI

THE SOUNDS OF POETRY TODAY

POETRY once used the ear alone as a channel to reach the attention and understanding of an audience. Today, although it has fallen back on visual appeals to a great extent, it still recalls its origins and looks towards musical effects. The silent reader is himself dealing with more or less vivid recollections of sounds of the spoken words as he follows the images of the written or printed characters that substitute for them. To evoke and convey auditory memories, the English language uses a system of spelling that presents a very great handicap through its archaism and irrationality. When the orthography was first worked out by Anglo-Saxon scribes, it did reflect the sounds of speech fairly accurately. The correlation was still quite good, though to a less degree, when the spelling of each word was (barring minor changes) standardized as we now have it, at the time of the invention of printing. What Caxton printed in the fifteenth century we still in large measure write today, unchanged. Yet since his time great transformations have occurred in pronunciation. Some consonants have been lost from words in which they were then pronounced, others have been transformed, and a great shifting of vowels has taken place. Hardly one of these is now pronounced as Caxton spoke it. The changes have been very complex, with exceptions and disturbing minor influences affecting the general pattern. The result is a system quite out of accord with the original values assigned to the letter-symbols of English orthography in print.

Thus it is that, while you are looking at one and the same symbol as it is repeated in a given line of verse, your inner ear

is today supposed to respond to a number of different sounds associated with it. Look at this line for instance (composed for illustration merely):

In *w*ater's *w*aves he s*a*nk his *a*wful c*a*res thus f*a*r.

No two of the sounds represented by the italic *a*'s are quite alike; of the six, two only are even approximately similar (the ones in *water* and *awful*), and even these are not similar in all dialects of English. Conversely, when the printed page holds out a seemingly diversified pattern, you may actually receive a monotonous message from it, if your attention is alert and your auditory sense-recall is vivid. So it is in these contrived lines:

Good-b*ye* O fair f*i*ne s*igh*er,
I shall b*uy* your l*ie*s no more,

where the six underscored spellings record the same diphthong (more accurately represented as [ai]) with misleading variety.

To analyse the auditory effects of contemporary verse, therefore, a primary task is to clear one's way through the confusing symbols to their true physical and physiological equivalents. For our purposes, a transliteration from conventional spelling to a very simple phonetic alphebet will be sufficient. We may ignore all sorts of fine shadings and distinctions that appear important to professional linguists, especially phoneticians, but a minimum amount of re-spelling in unambiguous terms is necessary. Fundamental craftsmanship and also elementary literary criticism require a knowledge of the physical medium being employed. A simple transliteration is easily done and is immediately rewarding for what it reveals.

At this point, therefore, it will be desirable to introduce a new manner of spelling that will indicate at least the more obvious sound patterns of English poetry to be perceived visually.[1] Among the consonants, most symbols are identical with the ones taught in school to children. They are presented here in the order of the conventional alphabet—irrational as that order is:

b d f h k l m p r t v w z

A few others that are sometimes ambiguous in ordinary English are also retained, but they require a word of explanation:

g is always pronounced as in *go*, never as in *gentle*;
n is always pronounced as in *no*, never as in *sing*;
s is always pronounced as in *so*, never as in *plays*, *wives*;
j is always pronounced as in German *ja* (or the *y* of *yes*).

Some letters are not needed at all in transcription, because they duplicate others:

c (which in English always stands for either *k* or *s*);
y (replaced usually by *j* or *i*);
q (which doubles for the *k*-sound before *w*);
x (the same as *k* followed by *s*).

In order to avoid using two symbols for one sound, and to reflect all consonants adequately, a few new symbols must be introduced:

ŋ stands for the final sound of *sing* (note that it is one sound, NOT *n* followed by a separate *g*);
ʃ or š stands for the 'sh' in *shall* (an unvibrated or 'voiceless' sound);
ʒ or ž stands for the 'g' in French *rouge*, or the 's' in *pleasure* (a vibrated or 'voiced' sound);
θ stands for the 'th' in *think, thin* ('voiceless');
ð stands for the 'th' in *the, these* ('voiced').

Finally, some sounds are closely associated in pairs, and should be so learned:

tʃ or tš for the initial consonant sounds in *chin, chase*;
dʒ or dž for the initial consonant sounds in *joke, judge*.

The vowels are a little more troublesome. At the same time, they are even more important than the consonants, because of their role in rhyme effects. For them too it is necessary to adopt a principle of one symbol for one sound, invariably the same one. For present purposes, 'length' of vowels may usually be disregarded. Variations in duration of sound are tied up with

variations in tenseness and slackness of the speech organs; and these can be indicated usually by different symbols. A colon [:] is sometimes used to indicate length.

ɑ is always the vowel of *far, father*;[2]
æ is always the vowel of *cat, hat, bag*;
a is always the first vowel in the diphthong of *my*;
e is always the vowel of *fête*;
ɛ is always the vowel of *men, then, there*;
ə is always the first (unstressed) vowel of *about, upon*;[3]
i is always the second vowel in *machine*; also the vowels in *beet* and *beat*;
ɪ is always the vowel of *it, bit*;
o is always the first vowel of *poetic*;
ɔ is always the vowel of *law, awe, more*; the first in *organic* and *hotly*;[4]
u is always the vowel of *rule, fool*;
ʊ is always the vowel for *wolf, good*;
ʌ is always the vowel for *up, much*.

We also have these diphthongs:

eɪ as in *weigh, they, play, say* (here represented by [e]);
aɪ as in *my, sigh*;
ɑʊ as in *now, cow, house*;
oʊ as in *bow* (noun), *though* (here represented by [o]);
jʊ as in *pure, beauty*;
ɔɪ as in *toy, boisterous*.

Finally, a number of vowels originally occurring before the sound of *r* have been so affected by the coming consonant that they have been levelled (as the term goes) to one sound in modern English. So it is that

ə: represents the vowel of *birth, word, heard, fur* (stressed syllables);
ə represents the final unstressed vowel in *labour, father, leathern*.

In some dialects the traces of the consonant can be more or less clearly detected (for instance, in most central and western dialects in America, except in the South).

In words of more than one syllable in English, stressed vowels are much clearer than in unstressed syllables. It is desirable to indicate the stress by a mark placed before the syllable in question:

e'ternity [i'tə:nɪtɪ], *o'asis* [o'esɪs], *'poetry* ['poətrɪ], *po'etic* [po'etɪk].

Through this system of simplified and unambiguous spelling it is much easier to detect what actual sounds are intended by the poets, and thus to judge their effectiveness on the physical level. A transcription will reveal unsuspected values, for both good and ill. We shall for the moment, however, defer the inquiry into the standards for judging these values qualitatively. The first task is to make sure that we have a clear picture of what they are.

A few examples will show the emergence of sound patterns from behind the concealments of the spelling.

Madrid, like a live eye in the Iberian mask,
Asks help from heaven and receives a bomb.
George Barker

mə'drɪd, laɪk ə laɪv aɪ ɪn ðɪ aɪ'bɪrɪən mɑsk
ɑsks help frɔm hevən ən rɪ'sivz ə bɔm.

Here the repetition of [ai] four times in the first line (in ***like, live, eye, Iberian***) is revealed, whereas a conventional spelling concealed it.

Again:

Truant too long from the booth of a tomb
Where bells rejoice bringing God's voice to me,
I run amuck among the ragamuffin roads
Chasing the rainbow for an hour of glory. . . .
George Barker

ˈtruənt tu lɔŋ frɔm ðə buθ əv ə tum
wɛə bɛlz riˈdʒɔɪs ˈbrɪŋɪŋ gɔdz vɔɪs tə mi
aɪ rʌn əˈmʌk əˈmʌŋ ðə ˈrægəmʌfɪn rodz
ˈtʃesɪŋ ðə ˈrenbov fɔ ən ɑuə əv glɔrɪ.

Here the fourfold [u] of the first line emerges, the repetition of [ʌ] in the third is made clearly evident, and the identity of stressed vowels in *chase* and *rainbow* comes out into visibility.

Many lines of modern poetry deliberately echo similar vowel sounds through one or more lines, whether in an effort to imitate natural sounds (see 'onomatopoeia', discussed below), or for purely musical effects. Robert Lowell has used a series of staccato [ɪ]'s in one line, followed by slower syllables ending with nasals (which give heightened resonance) in a picture impression of what he calls the 'unseasoned liberators' entering a Rhineland city in 1945:

> The search-guns click and spit and split up timber
> Fall
> And winter, spring and summer, guns unlimber
> And lumber. . . .
>
> ðə sə:tʃ-gʌnz klɪk ən spɪt ən splɪt ʌp ˈtɪmbə . . .
> fɔl
> ən ˈwɪntə, sprɪŋ ən ˈsʌmə, gʌnz ʌnˈlɪmbə
> ən ˈlʌmbə.

Tradition has long recognized that the final position in any unit of poetic speech—whether line or half-line with break (called hemistich) or stanza—is psychologically conspicuous. It is therefore a favoured spot for sound adornments. One method is a pattern of echoed similar sounds: various kinds of rhyme. Yet modern rhyme is by no means limited to the simple *cat : hat* type of correspondence laid down in nineteenth-century handbooks. The broader contemporary usage requires special examination. A certain number of new terms are required for the discussion of them.

Identical rhyme means the use of precisely the same syllable two or more times for purposes of verse adornment. It usually appears at the ends of lines of verse. Sometimes it arises by repetition of the same word in the same meaning, as illustrated throughout the 'Canzone' of W. H. Auden, where for five twelve-line stanzas the only rhymes are formed by the words *day, love, know, will,* and *world,* repeatedly self-paired in final position. Identical rhyme may also be effected by the use of homonyms: words identical in sound but having different meanings, usually different origins, and sometimes different spellings, such as *hart* : *heart.* Traditional English poetry has made little use of identical rhymes, but with the recent vogue for puns as adornment—a reversion to an Elizabethan–Jacobean fashion—they have begun to enjoy greater favour among living poets.

Rhyme in the traditional sense of the term—that is, ordinary rhyme—permits the initial consonants or consonant groups in the compared syllables to differ, while the vowel elements and final consonants are identical. Simple rhyme is so widely used in English that verse examples are not necessary at this point. *Love* : *dove* [lʌv] : [dʌv], the monosyllables ubiquitous on Valentines, are rhyme words.

Feminine rhyme is disyllabic and has elements of identity together with the diversity of normal rhyme. The first syllables are stressed and form an ordinary rhyming pair. They are followed by completely identical unstressed syllables, as in *soulful* : *bowlful* ['solfvl] : ['bolfvl]. Feminine rhyme is often associated with humorous and satiric verse, as in the work of the seventeenth-century poet Samuel Butler. He made fun of Puritans who

> Compound with sins they are inclined to [ɪn'klaɪnd tə]
> By damning those they have no mind to. [maɪnd tə]

Lord Byron used feminine rhyme frequently throughout *Don Juan,* as in the mocking dedication:

Bob Southey! You're a poet—Poet-Laureate ['lɔriət]
And representative of all the race,
Although 'tis true that you turned out a Tory at ['tɔrɪ ət]
Last—yours has lately been a common case.

Auden imitates the effect throughout his *Letter to Lord Byron*:

So barons of the press who know their readers ['ridəz]
Employ to write their more appalling leaders ['lidəz]
Instead of Satan's horned and hideous minions, ['mɪnjʌnz]
Clever young men of liberal opinions. [o'pɪnjʌnz]

The historical shifting of vowels has, of course, affected our reading of normal rhymes, both feminine and masculine, in the older poets. Pairs of words that were proper rhymes when Shakespeare wrote his sonnets no longer conform to the pattern:

Who will believe my verse in time to come [kʊm]
If it were fill'd with your most high deserts? [dɪ'zɜrts]
Though yet, heaven knows, it is but a tomb [tum]
Which hides your life, and knows not half your parts. [pɑrts]

It is necessary to restore the older pronunciations indicated in order to obtain the effect of the original scheme. When words are today paired according to appearance rather than sound, in a pattern that elsewhere in the poem calls for an ordinary rhyme, the aberration is called:

Eye-rhyme, as with modern English *come*: *home* [kʌm] : [hom]. These two words were at no time a rhyming pair; the spelling has been misleading since its establishment. Other examples of eye-rhyme are *wind* [wɪnd] (as noun): *find* [faind]; *chose* [tʃoz]: *lose* [luz]; *blood* [blʌd]: *good* [gʊd]. Formerly it was customary to invoke a mysterious 'poetic licence', which was supposed to authorize the distortion of words in rhyme position so that they could show the expected conformities. Present doctrine and practice enjoin an observation of the actual pronunciation in normal speech, and the deviating rhymes (in a pattern otherwise strict) are tolerated rather because English is poor in true ones. For instance, Léonie Adams conforms to strict rhymes in

stanzas of her lyric 'Country Summer', which show a pattern of final syllables agreeing *a b b a* (that is, the two end lines rhyme with each other, and so do the two middle lines). But in one stanza she writes thus:

All stars stand close in summer air,	
And tremble, and look mild as amber;	['æmbə]
When wicks are lighted in the chamber	['tʃembə]
You might say stars were settling there.	

The inner pair of words looks like a perfect feminine rhyme on the printed page, but the transcription shows clearly that it is not.

Near-rhyme has only the final consonants of paired words coinciding; the vowels differ as well as the initial consonants, as in *take* : *look*. It is sometimes identical with eye-rhyme: that is, when the lack of vowel agreement is concealed behind misleading orthography. More usually, however, the pattern is employed in a deliberate and sustained manner. There is an articulate aesthetic principle behind the contemporary use of near-rhyme. To ears satiated with the monotonous conformities of conventional rhyme, especially as used in the nineteenth century, near-rhyme offers a welcome variety. The effect may seem dissonant, but it can have the advantage of a planned dissonance in music. The newer system accords well with relatively harsh themes. For instance, George Barker thus laments the death of an infant:

. . . He, though scarce	[skɛəs]
Earth breathing once	[wʌns]
Intuitively analysed the air	[ɛə]
Contagious of fatal and sour	[sɑʊə]
Ill, so sprang	[spræŋ]
Immaculate with the spring	[sprɪŋ]
Upon the skies' steps	[steps]
Laughing with his leaps	[lips]

Dylan Thomas has exploited the possibilities of near-rhyme extensively, and often with great skill:

The force that drives the water through the rocks [rɔks]
Drives my red blood; that drives the mouthing streams [strimz]
Turns mine to wax. [wæks]
And I am dumb to mouth into my veins [venz]
How at the mountain spring the same mouth sucks . . . [sʌks]
And I am dumb to tell the lover's tomb [tum]
How at my sheet goes the same crooked worm. [wə:m]

The subject of the poem is a contradiction, and the dissonance is appropriate to it. The poet has been affirming a physical kinship with the forces of nature, to which he feels a close sympathy, yet finally he proclaims a frustrating inability to make vocal that kinship in a shared doom, through lack of an immediate communication with nature. The near-rhymes, with only the final consonants agreeing, heighten a sense of frustration.

It may be noted that near-rhyme may occur in feminine paired syllables as well as masculine: for instance, *silting* : *melting*.

Assonance is a technique now enjoying a widened currency. Here the vowels alone conform in the paired syllables. Examples are *cat* : *have* [kæt] : [hæv], and—this time with misleading orthography—*loom* : *wound* [lum] : [wund] or *night* : *buy* [naɪt] : [baɪ]. Assonance is easier to detect than near-rhyme, since the vowel of a syllable carries with greater distinctness than its final consonant, which is often slurred in ordinary speech. Hence assonance may appear to the English ear to deviate less strikingly from rhyme than does near-rhyme, and the harshness may be correspondingly less. Assonance also permits a far wider choice of words from the English vocabulary than does the use of perfect rhyme. It is used concomitantly with near-rhyme by some poets, as here by Dylan Thomas:

Light breaks where no light shines [ʃaɪnz]
Where no sea runs, the waters of the heart
Push in their tides. . . . [taɪdz]

Although, as has been mentioned, assonance was very extensively used by epic poets composing for oral delivery in Old French, it has not had the same historical importance in earlier

English. Mediaeval poets in English preferred rhyme (or no pattern at all) for concluding syllables. Hence the vogue of assonance in recent years is, historically speaking, an innovation.

Alliteration is a sound effect, on the other hand, which has been used in English, both verse and prose, since the beginning of recorded literature. It is rarely associated with end-line patterns. Rather, it usually appears as an echo of similar sounds throughout the interiors of lines. It consists of a repetition of initial consonant elements, as in *clean* : *cloven* [klin] : [klovən] and *rain* : *rest* [ren] : [rest]. Besides its practical value as an aid to the memorizing of single lines, alliteration has been exploited for purely ornamental effects, and sometimes in an effort to imitate the sounds of nature.

Alliterating syllables may be the absolute first ones in the words thus linked, or they may be the first stressed ones. The attention is here directed towards beginnings, not endings, of word units, and hence we recognize alliterative effects best in words closely juxtaposed in series. Strongly alliterative verse seldom adds rhyme to its already conspicuous pattern.

Old English poetics (before the Norman Conquest in 1066) had laid down quite strict conventions for the distribution of alliterating syllables in verse. Middle English produced much alliterative verse in the same general tradition, though marked by a greater freedom of usage. This adornment was especially effective in epic themes, such as descriptions of battle, and also in vigorous social satire. Here are a few lines modernized from a fourteenth-century verse description of King Arthur's last battle:

> He pulled out a short knife, sheathed with silver,
> And would have stuck his throat, but no slit followed;
> His hand slipped and slid aslant on the mail,
> And the other man slyly slipped him under.
>
> *Morte d'Arthur*, ed. E. Björkman

Today, alliteration finds a variety of uses. It appears in political and other slogans used in English (*peace and prosperity*, *four freedoms*), in advertising, in many inherited catch-phrases

like *hearth and home, bed and board, bed and breakfast, time and tide.* Most contemporary poets employ it with restraint. An unusual experiment was tried when Edna St. Vincent Millay composed an opera libretto on an Anglo-Saxon subject, *The King's Henchman*, with a purely Germanic vocabulary strongly coloured by alliteration. A more recent experiment is W. H. Auden's revival of the Old English four-stress alliterative line in *The Age of Anxiety*, which actually adopts and modernizes some phrases from *Beowulf*:

> *H*igh were those *h*eadlands; the eagles promised
> *L*ife without *l*awyers. Our *l*ong convoy
> *T*urned away northwards as *t*ireless gulls
> *W*ove over *w*ater *w*ebs of brightness
> And *s*ad *s*ound.

The echoes from the eighth-century epic are here applied to suggest a parallel between its hero and the modern Air Force officer whose thoughts are expressed in these lines.

Alliterative assonance is a coincidence in both the initial consonant and the vowel elements of two syllables, as in *loam*: *load* [lom]: [lod]. It is seldom used in consistent patterns, but it may appear as a special or accidental extension of ordinary alliteration. Two lines of the Auden work just quoted will illustrate it:

> As we *cy*cle *s*ilent through a serious land . . .
> [saɪkəl] : [saɪlənt]
> These old-world hamlets and haphazard lanes . . .
> [hæmlɛts] : [hæphæzəd]

Consonance[5] is far more frequent in modern poetry. As the term implies, it means coincidence of both consonant elements in grouped syllables, with only the vowels differing, as in *look* : *lake*. Thus consonance is in a sense a complement of assonance, where the vowels alone coincide. Ordinary speech gives us many familiar examples of consonance in our strong English verbs, where changes of tense are indicated by changes in root

vowels, while the consonants remain in most cases unaffected: *drive, drove, driven*; *sing, sang, sung*. A good example of consonance in entirely different words can be found in the concluding section of James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, which is composed in a rhythmical prose not far removed from poetry in its techniques: 'It's something *fails* us. First we *feel*. Then we *fall*' [fel] : [fil] : [fol]. A verse example occurs in a description of chrysanthemums by C. F. MacIntyre:

> They will grow tall and *stiff* [stɪf]
> for soldiers' shakos; they are soft and round
> for children (who may need them underground)
> and a dead dancer finds no better *stuff* [stʌf]
> for slipper pompons. . . .

Rhyme position. It has been tacitly assumed that all rhyme effects—except indeed alliteration—belong at the ends of verse lines. This is not always true. Any or all of them may be repeated throughout individual lines, marking subdivisions within them. No new principle is involved here, however. The subdivided units may be of equal or varying length; sometimes they coincide with parallel units in the structure of a sentence. Inner-line echoes are often sporadic while the final ones are carried out regularly. The former (rhymes and assonances) are scattered irregularly throughout Gerard Manley Hopkin's sonnet 'The Caged Skylark'. Here is the conclusion of the sestet:

> Man's spirit will be flesh-*bound* when *found* at best
> But unencumbered: meadow-*down* is not distressed
> For a rain*bow* footing it nor he for his *bones* risen.

There is normal rhyme in the first of these lines, and assonance in the last. Moreover, the repeated diphthong of line one appears conspicuously in the middle of the second. Even the unstressed syllables show a measure of assonating repetition (*will, dis-, it, his*), which echoes two of the stronger words (*spirit, risen*).

In his poem 'Epilogue', Auden employs consonance within lines, regular rhymes at the ends, alliteration, and a marked dactylic rhythm to heighten the nightmare effect of the images.

The last two stanzas are:

> 'O what was that bird,' said horror to hearer,
> 'Did you see that shape in the twisted trees?
> Behind you swiftly the figure comes softly,
> The spot on your skin is a shocking disease.'
>
> 'Out of this house'—said rider to reader
> 'You never will'—said farer to fearer
> 'They're looking for you'—said hearer to horror
> As he left him there, as he left him there.

Interior sound effects are so obtruded as to subordinate the importance of meaning in Marianne Moore's 'His Shield', an elaborate figure of speech holding up the porcupine as a model for human self-defensive behaviour. The creature is called:

> The pin-swin or spine-swine
> (the edgehog miscalled hedgehog) with
> all his edges out,
> echidna and echinoderm in distressed-
> pin-cushion thorn-fur coats,
> the spiny pig or porcupine. . . .

There is obvious repetition of the sounds [aɪ] and [ɪ]. A complete phonetic transcription will bring out all of the interior effects in their fullness.

End-rhyme does not always fall at the end of a sentence or of a chief sentence part. It may, of course, and in fact it very often does. All of us have learnt as children, and it may be have chanted in unison with others, the simple, old-fashioned verses that rigidly correlate the two. The more jingling and obvious the beat, the more regular the coincidence of line and sentence units is apt to be, whether in nursery stanzas about Miss Muffet and Jack Horner, or primary-school favourites about Horatius at the Bridge and Barbara Fritchie. In fact, much classical English verse of all periods shows a preference for end-stopped lines. Shakespeare leaned heavily on them in his earlier plays and poems. It was later that he veered to 'blank' (unrhymed)

verse and run-on lines simultaneously, so that in the great mature passages one's ear is only half aware, as it were, of the demarcation of lines as units.

Subdued and concealed rhymes. A running-on of sentence units unbroken beyond the line boundary is called *enjambment* (a French term). The poetic advantages are great in appealing to ears dulled by the hypnotic hammering of regularly divided sentence parts with rhymes equidistantly placed. When the breaks between lines and breaks between clauses no longer coincide, rhyme drops into a subordinate, half-concealed accompaniment, the subtler for being muted.

For a listener, the result is a blurring of the structural outlines in the total form. Formality thus becomes a little less formal in the otherwise rigidly prescribed units of rhyme patterning like the sonnet, the heroic couplet, or the Spenserian stanza. A comparison of almost any Elizabethan sonnet sequence with the sonnets of a modern like Allen Tate will show the difference in treating sentences in relation to lines. The obscuring of boundaries may be compared to an analogous change in painting, when the clearly outlined figures of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, producing a two-dimensional effect, were replaced by images with softened edges in the later pictures, seeming to loom out of the depths of the third dimension. ■

So far have some contemporaries gone in the subduing of line boundaries that they split words in the middle, and permit the unstressed ending of one word to rhyme with the stressed syllable of another. Hopkins does the latter in 'The Windhover':

The unorthodox division of *king-dom* between two lines

> I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
> dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon in his
> riding
> Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
> High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
> In his ecstasy!

permits the rhyme of the first syllable with *wing*. Notice also the examples of alliteration, alliterative assonance, internal masculine and feminine rhymes. Marianne Moore, in the poem about the hedgehog already quoted, splits her hortatory lines thus, as she advises men to become like other types of thick-skinned animals:

> . . . Become dinosaur-
> skulled, quilled or salamander-wooled, more ironshod
> and javelin-dressed than a hedgehog battalion of
> steel; but be
> dull. Don't be envied or
> armed with a measuring-rod.

Here *dinosaur* at the end of the first line, split from its hyphenated compound, is permitted to rhyme with the unaccented word *or* at the end of the fifth line. The pairing of *-shod* with *-rod* is also inconspicuous and very unusual in practice. So far has the rhyming been toned down, indeed, that the casual listener may doubt its existence. Only a vague perception of echoed patterns prevents one from regarding such passages as blank verse or irregular free verse, unless the eye receives assistance from the arrangement of lines on the printed page.

Sound Symbolism? With the mechanics of analysing patterned sound once mastered, we are in a position to look towards a more complicated problem of psychology and aesthetics. Is there some aspect of physical sound in verse, we may ask, that lets us correlate it to emotional and intellectual content, in such a way that the sounds themselves will evoke recognizable overtones of meaning? Do the mere sounds of words in a language we don't know help us to guess the meanings? If this were so, the actual physical medium of verse might lend itself to symbolic expression, aside from dictionary meanings.

A limited number of word-units in any language, taken in isolation, are conceded to have some physical resemblances to the sounds of nature they designate. We have already touched on this literal imitation or onomatopoeia. For example, sibilant

sounds are made by the rapid escape of air through any small aperture, mechanical or organic, such as we form with tongue and palate to produce [s], [z], and [ʃ]. Hence the statement 'she hisses' [ʃi 'hɪsəz] is mimetic of the action reported. So is the Latin *susurrus est* ('there is a whisper'). The resonance of [m] in the bony oral and nasal cavities resembles echoes from hollow vessels in nature, and may evoke recollections of them in words like *murmur, memorial.* But linguists have repeatedly expressed the warning that the association of sound with sense is far more often arbitrary, and far less often imitative, than naïve inquirers might suppose. Words like *thunder, lightning, dead, swoon, lumbering* have achieved a kind of descriptive sound value more by association than by intrinsic appropriateness of sound. Even *thud* is less descriptive of dull impact than one might suppose, for the initial consonant [θ] is sharply expelled, and the final one is lightly pronounced, often barely audible, neither one being especially qualified to express weight.

It must be remembered, too, that many sounds that are more justly claimed to be direct reflectors of nature or man's feelings, according to present-day pronunciation, have changed to what they now are from older sounds quite unlike them. *Thud* itself probably developed out of a word with a mild initial [t], unvoiced and unaspirated, in prehistoric times. A modern speaker may find the initial aspiration of *horrible* and *horror* evocative of ghostly sensations and sounds, and may thus feel that the meaning is heightened by acoustic symbolism, but the linguistic root of these words actually sounded quite different in prehistoric times. It began with a very definite guttural, something like a vigorously exploded [g], instead of the present eerie [h]. If a writer feels that the initial consonant cluster in *chafe* and the final one in *retch* symbolize painful tearing or friction, he may be able to convey a heightened sensation to his readers through artful association of these words with others in a sentence, chosen to reinforce them through sound and sense. But the words themselves were formerly less adapted to this particular symbolism than they are now. The sounds in question were

once plain *k*-sounds, without the friçtion deriving from [tʃ·] We cannot be at all sure from what still earlier sounds these evolved, tens of thousands of years before the most primitive forms we can surmise from our first written records.

Even though there may be a kind of perceptible harmony between sound and sense, then, in a limited number of words as spoken today, the relationship may be fortuitous, not due to poetic insight on the part of the first human speakers. Ignorance of linguistic change has betrayed some poets and critics into exaggerated claims for the poetic medium as a reflector of primitive, enduring psychological attitudes. However, this is no reason for not making use of such suggestive parallels in sound as do exist in today's language, in order to deepen its evocative power in chosen situations, such as descriptions of nature. The poet need not be too greatly concerned about the origins of sound effects that he may find aesthetically useful. It is the literary critics who need to be warned against unfounded theories on the subject.[6]

What symbolism does exist is based on objective, measurable factors in articulation—friction, explosion, hissing of consonants, etc.—which may be brought into relationship with subjective psychological factors. Vowel sounds as well as consonants have some obvious physical characteristics that invite poetic exploitation. The physiological apparatus of speech becomes tenser for the production of some of these—[i] and [e], for instance—than for others such as [o] and [a] and [ɔ]. The differentiation has been noticed by linguists, and even some of the most cautious have speculated on the psychological traits in language sounds. The high, front, tense vowels have been associated with nearness and immediacy, while the back, relaxed vowels suggest distance in time or space or urgency, in more than one language.

The principle may be demonstrated by watching the muscular effects as one pronounces *these* [ðiz] in contrast to *those* [ðoz], or the French *celui-ci* in contrast to *celui-là* (where the final syllables express nearness and distance respectively). A similar

contrast appears in the English strong verbs, which show consistent consonance, but mark a shift from near, present action to past, remoter action by a change in the vowels. There is a drop in tenseness between *freeze* and *froze*, between *see* and *saw*; and so with many others. The correlation was even more apparent in earlier stages of English and its sister languages of the Indo-European family. In Semitic languages the front vowels of the verb system are said to denote transitory states, while the back vowels denote permanency and a state of rest. So cautious a linguist as Eduard Prokosch suggested an instructive parallel from childhood prattle overheard in the nursery. 'A little steam engine tries to climb a hill and says cheerfully, "I think I can, I think I can." But the hill is too steep, the poor engine slides back and says sadly, "I thought I could, I thought I could." The front vowels [ɪ, æ] aptly characterize the active interest in the successful performance, the back vowels [ɔ, ʊ] the melancholy retrospect to what might have been.' [7]

Another obvious correlation may be noticed between language sounds and poetic effect in the case of the nasal consonants. These sounds [m], [n], [ŋ] are sent through the nose and gain resonance from the bony cavity behind the nasal passage. Genevieve Taggard has clearly availed herself of this physiological fact in her attempt to describe the effect of a bell ringing and the changed mood resulting from its peals. The resonance of nasals is here reinforced by the two liquid consonants *r* and *l*:

> . . . . I broke the air and the stone; and the bell
> Began to hum with the hum of bronze.
>
> The air was nimble and all agroan,
> And rung with the agony of the bell.
> And joy was born in echo-bronze.
>
> I am that joy, tip-dulcet of tone,
> The thrill of the bell I am; and the still
> Lip of the bell.
> Calm, calm I clang.

There are, then, some finer adaptations of appropriate sounds to certain types of meaning, beyond the few and crudely obvious cases of onomatopoeia observable in the living speech of today. Some of them are closely bound up with rhythm and pitch, subjects not yet discussed. We shall revert to them, therefore, at the end of the next chapter, when the rudiments of scansion have been presented in a short survey.

CHAPTER VI: NOTES

1. The symbols used here are generally limited to those appearing in Albert H. Markwardt's *Introduction to the English Language*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1942. For the sake of simplicity, a number of nuances are ignored, for instance, the actual diphthong status of the sounds here represented as [e] and [o], and certain gradations of length.

2. In England the sound [ɑ] occurs in some words where [æ] appears in most regional dialects of American: *ask, dance, pass* are among them.

3. Note that this obscure sound is spelled in many ways. It always occurs in unstressed syllables.

4. A similar sound, but shorter and in a higher position, appears in *not, rod*, etc. In America it is closer to [a], and is so represented in Markwardt's system.

5. For this term and other helpful suggestions I am indebted to a valuable short article by Professor Stephen L. Mooney, 'New Devices in Sound Repetition', *Word Study*. G. and C. Merriam Co., XXIV, No. 4, April, 1949, pp. 1–4. Two additional terms explained by Mr. Mooney are *analysed rhyme* and *apocopated rhyme*. The former shows a crossing of two rhyme-schemes, namely of the arrangement of two different devices in an order *abab* or *abba*. The consonants are arranged to suggest one type of pairing, while the vowels conform to the other. As example the following stanza of Frank Kendon is quoted:

I spend my days *vainly*,
Not in de*light*;
Though the world is e*late*
And tastes her joys *finely*

The consonants of *finely* [faɪnlɪ] go with *vainly* (venlɪ], but the accented diphthong of *finely* goes with that in *delight* [dɪ'laɪt].—Apocopated rhyme permits a pairing of a masculine with a feminine rhyme (or near-rhyme). The words *delight* : *finely* illustrate this.

6. Even more fanciful is the Freudian type of psychological correlation proposed for some language sounds: for instance, that [m], a sound suggestive of sucking, hence of a child's relation to its mother, is by this

elemental association symbolic of general affirmation and approval; or that [p], made by blowing one's lips apart, means rejection—and hence by Oedipean transfer becomes the symbolic initial for words (*pater, papa,* etc.) meaning father. Apparently no children are supposed to express consonantal approval if the terms are Indo-European cognates of *pater.* Linguists in particular are sceptical of such theories; anthropologists also, as they deny the universality of familial attitudes involving acceptance and rejection. Kenneth Burke has included a Freudian interpretation of consonant sounds in his *Attitudes to History.* New York, 1937. Sir Richard Paget has tried to establish a correlation between sounds and human activities in *Human Speech.* New York and London, 1930, but this too is rather sceptically regarded.

7. E. Prokosch, *A Comparative Germanic Grammar.* Philadelphia: The Linguistic Society of America, 1939, p. 122.

CHAPTER VII

RHYTHMS, DYNAMICS, HARMONICS

THE individual sounds in words, whether put together in verse or in prose, contribute, of course, only a part of the total general effect. There is all the difference in the world between the enunciation of separate speech units, unnaturally distinct from each other, and the normal flow of words as we join them together in phrases. No one says 'Get: to: the: point: please', except perhaps a misguided pedant. Articulation of this emphatic type would be as tiresome to the ear as an unvaried volume in music, and would lead, in fact, to its direct opposite: that is, no emphasis at all, since the element of contrast would be missing.

It has already become apparent from what was said before that some sounds are sharper, more distinct than others. The [ə] in the first syllable of *about* is obscure in comparison with the accented [aʊ] of the second. Obviously the difference is connected somehow with the incidence of that accent, a matter we have already touched upon in advance.

Accent means a greater volume of sound, or an increased intensity in articulation, or both, brought to bear on one syllable in contrast to its neighbours. All languages vary the intensities in polysyllabic words and in closely knit phrases, some more so than others. English shows sharper contrasts in the dynamic effects, and a more rigid scheme in the placing of those contrasts, than did classical Greek and Latin, or than French does today.

Strong accent on a syllable is accompanied by tensity of the speech organs, such as tongue and vocal cords, which thus emit a clear vowel sound. Lack of accent is associated with a relaxation of the organs, thus lowering the tensity and reducing

the clarity of the sound. Accordingly, syllables important for meaning are normally stressed and have sharper vowel sounds than words serving merely as connectives, like *of, its, to, but, since.* In English the alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables produces not only the basic patterns of rhythm, but also contributes much to the variety in the qualities of vowel sounds throughout a speech unit. Actually, stress [1] is not a simple matter of relative loudness. Duration, pitch, and harmonics will also be seen to determine which syllables stand out above others. These, alternating with the less conspicuous ones, produce the designed patterns of scansion in verse.

The study of English metrics in the schools has been profoundly influenced by Latin and Greek prosody, and much of our terminology has been lifted over unchanged from the vocabulary of the ancients. The transfer is not entirely appropriate. The cultivated classical ear, hearkening to verse read aloud, was less concerned to detect the relatively unobtrusive stress (*ictus*) than to follow the arrangements of quantitatively long and short syllables in sequence. The terminology applied to their patterns, then, referred to alternation of contrasting quantities, whereas ours refers to alternation of greater and less stress. Attempts have been made at various times to apply classical scansion to English verse, but without success. Our ictus is too obvious to evade primary attention. Nevertheless, the traditional classical terminology is useful, being already established, and there is no harm in adopting it if the new application to stress is clearly understood. It is useful to know the traditional names of the most important units of scansion, for they are still widely used.

The unit of scansion is, as commonly understood, a *foot.* This means a combination of one, two, three, or four (seldom more) stressed syllables with a varying number of unstressed ones. The unit may be repeated unchanged throughout a line of verse. Or two, rarely more, types of feet may be combined in a pattern of repetitions and alterations.

Here are the feet most familiar in English scansion.

Two-syllable units. An unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one is called an *iamb*, conventionally represented as: x ′. (Some handbooks use the notation ⏑ ′ or ∼ ′.) Its complement is a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed one, a combination called *trochee*: ′ x. Two strong stresses making up a single foot are called *spondee*: ′ ′. More cannot be done in a unit of two parts, with at least one of them stressed. But sometimes a pause —like a 'rest' in music—may take the place of the unstressed part.

The most elementary devices for diversifying a normally iambic line are: to introduce an occasional extra unstressed syllable; to replace an iamb by a trochee; to suppress an unstressed syllable entirely, thus bringing two stresses together. When a trochee is followed by an iamb, the combination ′ x x ′ occurs. The whole is called a *choriamb*, one of the commonest variations at the opening of an iambic line. Rossetti began three of his sonnets with them: 'Eat thou and drink'. 'Watch thou and fear'. 'Think thou and act' (*House of Life*, Nos. 71, 72, and 73). The presence of many unstressed syllables may be noted in the concluding lines of Santayana's sonnet 'As in the midst of battle', but the formal pattern imposes stress on some of them:

> For morning, with a ray of tenderest joy
> Gilding the iron heaven, hides the truth,
> And evening gently woos us to employ
> Our grief in idle catches. Such is youth;
> Till from that summer's trance we wake, to find
> Despair before us, vanity behind.

It is a commonplace of the art of scansion to say that stress in verse should not fall on words not normally receiving emphasis in a prose sentence. Hence we may question the appropriateness of the opening choriamb in the fifth line of Santayana just quoted. Conversely, emphatic words require stress even at the risk of disturbing the metrical pattern. These iambic lines of William Empson begin with a spondee followed by a trochee, as the sense demands; only with the third foot does the iambic rhythm assert itself:

This last pain for the damned the Fathers found:
'They knew the bliss with which they were not crowned.'

Notice, however, that in the second line two relatively unimportant words—*which* and *were*—receive ictus, whereas *not*—semantically more important—does not get it, according to the prevailing iambic rhythm.

A spondee contrasting with iambs or trochees is, of course, doubly emphatic because of its more rapid environment, as here (a passage employing inner assonance and consonance, by the way, to heighten the effect):

Many men mean
Well, but tall walls
Impede, their hands bleed and
They fall, their seed the
Seed of the fallen.
George Barker

Three-syllable units. In these may be found one, two, or three stresses variously combined with two or more unstressed syllables. A *dactyl* begins with one stress: ′ x x; an *anapaest* reverses the order: x x ′; a *molossus* is simply three accents in unbroken sequence: ′ ′ ′. Obviously this last foot cannot repeat itself throughout an entire line; it must be combined with others for contrast. A slow molossus is, however, quite effective in certain positions, for instance at the beginning or end of a line otherwise showing more rapid movement. Joyce Kilmer (who wrote at the time of the First World War) used the final spondee and molossus for such contrast in the description of a fashionable party: 'Lów, rích vóices, delicate gáy críes', and 'Sheraton and Hepplewhite and óld thín spoóns, / Rather dim paintings on véry hígh wálls . . .' Being even heavier than the spondee, the molossus may be expected to be allied with correspondingly important sense. It is also effective in final position in rhythmical prose: '. . . we walked by the dúll gréy séa'.

Another variation of the three-syllable foot is the *cretic*: ′ x ′. Sometimes the difference between cretic and molossus is quite

subjective when monosyllabic words are concerned. A reader may determine for himself how to treat lines such as 'Dead winds and spent waves' riot' and 'Wan waves and wet winds' labour' from Swinburne's 'Garden of Proserpine'. Gerard Manley Hopkins instructs his readers occasionally by placing the mark of desired ictus above doubtful syllables: 'As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies dráw fláme . . .' Thus we are warned not to read the last three syllables as a cretic.

Dactyls in unbroken series soon become monotonous, as will be recalled by generations of school-children in America who have studied Longfellow's *Evangeline*. Swinburne burlesqued his own fondness for dactyls, together with other mannerisms, in a parody called 'Nephelidia' ('Little Clouds'):

> From the depths of the dreamy decline of the dawn through a notable nimbus of nebulous noonshine,
> Pallid and pink as the palm of the flag-flower that flickers with fear of the flies as they float. . . .

Alliteration, another of Swinburne's weaknesses, is also pushed to absurdity here.

The ancients combined spondees with dactyls in the hexameter (six-foot) line to obtain a pleasing variety. Modern English writers use other feet as well, not only the ones already mentioned; but also the *amphibrach*: x ′ x. Obviously, where the feet are very much diversified in a line, it is difficult to determine the boundaries between them according to conventional units. A sonnet by John Crowe Ransome, 'The Tall Girl,' begins with a conventional five-foot iambic line: 'The Queens of Hell had lissome necks to crane . . .' but the second is varied, chiefly by suppressing some unaccented syllables and doubling others: 'At the tall girl approaching with long tread.'

Four-syllable units are not really distinguished as such; the English ear is trained to break them down into two parts by force of habit. We have already mentioned the choriamb, ′ x x ′, which may be regarded as an iamb followed by a trochee.

Classical prosody offers a term, the *paeon*, for four-syllable units featuring one stress, regardless of where it falls. According to the disposition of the single ictus, these are:

1st paeon ′ x x x as in *lingeringly*
2nd paeon x ′ x x as in *devótedly*
3rd paeon x x ′ x as in *uncondítioned*
4th paeon x x x ′ as in *interdepénd*

Paeons are often interspersed in prose otherwise strongly iambic–trochaic in its beat. They are readily modified into two-foot units, dipodies, by secondary stress: *unconditoned* can thus function as two trochees. An accent may also become movable in a given word, under the compulsion of strong rhythmic environment, as when an *'oblate* devotion' is read as either *'oblate* or *ob'late*, depending on the rest of the phrase. Here the stress is said to 'hover'. It does so in words where usage permits a certain latitude. Hovering stress is sometimes—mistakenly—invoked to justify entirely unnatural distortion of pronunications that are definitely fixed in normal speech, as, for instance, if *frigate* is accented on the second syllable in order to provide a rhyme for *late*. Such abuse of freedom is included under what is popularly called 'poetic licence', but it is qualitatively different from the slight shifts made in cases of true hovering.

Line forms are designated by the numbers of feet appearing in each: *tetrameter* (four-foot), *pentameter* (five-foot), *hexameter* (six-foot). Sometimes the designation is by the number of syllables: *hendecasyllabic* means an eleven-syllabled line. A half-line is sometimes called a *hemistich*. When a perceptible break in sense occurs in the middle of a line, emphasized by a pause in the scansion, this is called a *caesura*. In the lines of Swinburne quoted above, a caesura falls after *dawn* in the first line and *flower* in the second.

Verse forms are combinations of lines in groups, *stanzas*, marked by regular arrangements for the lengths and rhyme-schemes.

Various line forms are used in repetition and in combination with others. The terms are self-explanatory for the most part: *rhyming couplets*, *quatrains* (four-line stanzas), etc. Special arrangements of grouped lines have received special names for historical reasons. Examples are the rhyme royal, Spenserian stanza, English and Italian sonnet forms, terza rima. For these terms, consult the appendix.

An important factor contributing to stress is the varying length or duration of syllables as measured in time. What one would surmise intuitively is confirmed by experiment, namely that unaccented syllables are markedly shorter in duration than the rest. A study made some years ago by Ada Snell from recorded readings gave the following estimates for syllables in four lines of Shelley's 'The Cloud'. Figures indicate time in hundredths of seconds.

I bring fresh showers for the thirsting flowers
.25 .35 .15 .80 (.15) .15 .15 .30 .20 .60 (.20)
From the seas and the streams; (Pause)
.20 .18 .42 .15 .15 .62 .75
I bear light shade for the leaves when laid
.20 .35 .30 .50 .18 .18 .34 .40 .45
In their noon-day dreams. (Pause)
.18 .20 .22 .20 .70 .60

The general conclusions are that strength and length coincide in nine-tenths of the instances observed; and despite all variations, the average lengths of long and short syllables are proportionately related as two to one. But no simple correlation of stress and duration was to be observed. There was an occasional prolongation of unstressed syllables beyond the usual time, as might be expected. In the third line by Shelley, the technically unstressed *light* is almost as long as the stressed beat of the same line, or of *bring* in the first. These words are more important to the sense than prepositions like *in*, *for*, and *of*.

The calculations by Dr. Snell also show clearly the importance of pauses within and between lines.[2] Silence can function to elevate both sense and emotion. Muriel Rukeyser often depends

on it, and indicates its appearance by punctuating and spacing within the printed lines:

> For all men : effort is freedom, effort's peace,
> it fights. And along these truths the soul goes home
> flies in its blazing to a place,
> more safe and round than Paradise.

It is questionable, however, whether the indicated pauses in Miss Rukeyser's verse are always justified by the sense.

Twentieth-century poets have been experimenting with rhythm in many ways. In a reaction against eighteenth-century formality and nineteenth-century smoothness, they have been largely concerned to avoid too obviously regular measures. Monotonously regular feet, as in Robert Frost's 'Once by the Pacific', are not typical of present tendencies:

> The shattered water made a misty din
> Great waves looked over others coming in,
> And thought of doing something to the shore
> That water never did to land before.

Besides the minor inversions and substitutions already mentioned, there are bolder effects achieved by the sudden switching from one marked metre to another in mid-line. The result is that the insistent beat of the first hemistich continues to be heard by the inner ear, so to speak, while the outer is already taking in the beat of the second, just as sharp light-and-dark patterns persist physically on the inner eye after the stimulus is withdrawn. The effect of double rhythm is sometimes called syncopation. It may be compared to the playing of triplets simultaneously with four beats in the same measure of music. In a series of measures, the main beats coincide at regular intervals. Many examples of combined rhythms are to be found in the lyrics of Gerard Manley Hopkins:

> Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume here and
>
> . . . the just man justices;
> Kéeps gráce: thát keeps all his goings graces . . .

where a rapid half line is followed by a slow one, or vice versa. Dylan Thomas does the same thing in his poem 'The force that through the green fuse drives the flower . . .' part of which was quoted in the preceding chapter. When combined with exaggerated emphasis, syncopation comes close to the effects of the popular music designated by the same term. Vachel Lindsay emphasized that affinity and used it to evoke rhythms borrowed by American song-writers from Negro speech and verse:

> A good old Negro in the slums of the town
> Preached at a sister for her velvet gown,
> Howled at a brother for his low down ways,
> His prowling, guzzling, sneak-thief ways.

Notice what the expectation of final molossus (the foot most frequently syncopated with dactyls and iambs in this poem) does to the word *velvet* in line two. It causes the normally fixed accent to hover.[3]

Hovering or shifted accent may often be found in syncopated rhythm, as this example indicates. This and similar freedoms may cause an ambiguity in the scansion that is entirely legitimate when both of the alternate possibilities place the stress in duly significant positions. Analyse this, for instance:

> The hand that signed the paper felled a city;
> Five sovereign fingers taxed the breath,
> Doubled the globe of dead and halved a country;
> These five kings did a king to death.
>
> *Dylan Thomas*

The subject here, by the way, is the dreadful responsibility of a hand that signs an unjust pact like the Munich Agreement of 1938, which is the general theme of the poem. Here the first line may be read as a series of two first paeons with an extra or uncounted weak syllable at the beginning (*anacrusis*) and a final trochee: x | ′ x x x | ′ x x x | ′ x. Or, more slowly as a regular trochaic line with anacrusis: x | ′ x | ′ x | ′ x | ′ x | ′ x. It is also possible to be aware of both movements simultaneously. In the second line, *sovereign* and *taxed* may be left unstressed or they

may be emphasized, depending on whether the movement is to be rapid (dactyl plus paeon) or slow (trochaic with strong introductory beat, or anacrusis). In the last line, *five* can also be variously treated. If stressed, it produces a weighty and effective molossus at the beginning: ′ ′ ′ | x x ′ | x ′. If not, it permits reading of the line as predominantly iambic, with an opening rest and one extra syllable within the line: ′ x | x ′ | x x ′ | x ′. Each line is enriched by the echo of preceding rhythms, partly coincident and partly divergent.

Still greater freedoms exist in the treatment of metrical units; so many, indeed, that verse forms may be said to grade imperceptibly into prose. Some intermediate stages have designedly been used by certain poets in preference to the regular, scannable forms just surveyed.

Free verse or *vers libre* was a subject of experimentation and ~~vociferous~~ debate about the time of the First World War. It employed lines of irregular length with an irregular metrical beat that was, however, closer to regularity than that of ordinary prose, and was correspondingly more conspicuous. Some writers attempted also to incorporate the rhythms of colloquial speech, somewhat adapted for rhythmic effects. Because measures were elastic and not clearly defined, symmetry was sometimes obtained by syntactic means (see Chapter IV). Similar sentence elements were repeated in balanced lengths. Thus John Gould Fletcher in 'Green Symphony':

> The trees are like a sea;
> Tossing,
> Trembling,
> Roaring,
> Wallowing,
> Darting their long flickering fronds up at the sky
> Spotted with white blossom-spray.

The parallelism of words ending in *-ing* is obvious, and is further enhanced by their position on the printed page. Carl Sandburg, in parts of 'The Windy City', used slightly longer lines:

Under the foundations,
Over the roofs,
The bevels and the blue prints talk it over.
The wind of the lake shore waits and wanders.
The heave of the shore wind hunches the sand piles.
The winkers of the morning stars count out cities
And forget the numbers.

Here there is a rhythmical similarity in the series of phrases standing alone and after nouns. Balancing of sentence units is familiar in quasi-metrical prose. It translates well, as is demonstrated in polyglot versions of the Bible. Walt Whitman embodied it in his pioneer work anterior to the vers-librists, and his has been one of the strong influences exercised (together with that of the Bible) on these coming after him.

When appositions and phrases having the same grammatical construction are emphasized by repetition and similar phraseology in units of similar length, they may result unintentionally in something very close to verse. Strong sentiments are conducive to this effect in oratory. They are not always marked by the special cadences of rhythmical prose (see below), but there is a noticeable rhythm in the structure of the sentences. An example is to be found in the eloquent speech of Bartolomeo Vanzetti upon being condemned to death by an American court in 1927. Rearrangement of the sentences on the printed page will clearly show the structural rhythms. The foreign colouring of the language by no means reduces the effect of high seriousness in the concluding lines:

If it had not been for this thing
I might have live out my life
  talking at street corners to scorning men.
I might have die [*sic*],
  unmarked
  unknown,
  a failure.
Now we are not a failure. [i.e. Sacco and I]
This is our career and our triumph.

Never in our full life could we hope to do so much
  for tolerance,
  for justice,
  for man's understanding of men
as now we do by accident.
Our words, our lives, our pains—nothing!
The taking of our lives—
  lives of a good shoemaker and a poor philosopher.
All!
That last moment belongs to us—
that agony is our triumph.

The effort made by some poets to embody colloquial idiom in colloquial rhythms has been only partially successful. John Weaver made the most ambitious attempt to employ 'vulgar' American English as a poetic medium, but it was precisely in the rhythms that his results were poorest. The self-consciously substandard vocabulary and syntax failed to conceal a monotonous beat that is actually alien to the effects of free verse and to colloquial prose discourse alike. Amy Lowell tried to combine both types of freedom, metrical and linguistic, in the verse monologue (spoken by a woman before an American country judge) called 'Number 3 on the Docket':

You can't even guess what that silence was.
I'd hear it whisperin' in my ears,
An' I got frightened, 'twas so thick,
An' al'ays comin' back.
Ef Ed would ha' talked sometimes
It would ha' driven it away;
But he never would.
He didn't hear it same as I did.

The satirically realistic passages by T. S. Eliot attempt the same combination, as in *The Waste Land*:

He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,
And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said.
Oh is there, she said. Something o' that, I said.
Then I'll know who to thank, she said, and give me a straight look.

The recurrence of 'she (I) said', though at irregular intervals, gives an effect of delimiting rhythmical units. Besides, it authentically echoes a mannerism of colloquial discourse.

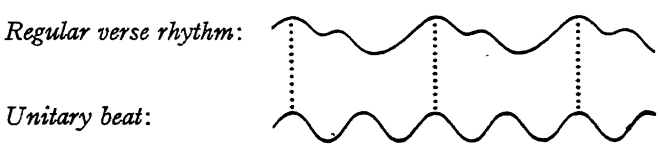
Rhythmical prose. So far, we have been content to remark that some verse is more loosely organized than the rest; that the units may be irregular and the stresses may fall with varying numbers of syllables between them. It has been assumed, however, that despite all such liberties a recognizable pulse is felt beneath the surface, and that a listener's emotions are quickened correspondingly, as always happens when otherwise haphazard stimuli—especially sound stimuli—appear to be grouping themselves in formal order, like that of the dance or the march, for instance. Can these intuitive judgments be put upon a more objective foundation? The question has often been asked. A serious student of poetry will not be satisfied with the evasive statement that this or that passage must be prose or verse simply because some critic 'feels' that it is so. It will be useful to begin an inquiry into the matter with a discussion of its physiological basis.

All of our experience, as psychologists have pointed out, is received and organized by us in terms of bodily pulses (breathing, heart-beats, etc.), which are rhythmical. Exhilaration or depression, stimulants or medication, may affect the intervals, but under normal conditions they tend to follow a regular sequence. We sense them, waking or sleeping, whether we consciously reflect on them or not. We co-ordinate the daily revolutions of the earth and the annual cycling of the seasons with our bodies' temporal registering of events in pulsed subdivisions of experience. Some persons register more awarely than others. These are the ones who 'sense' when time is getting late, and what the hour is, without reference to a watch, and who 'automatically wake up' before the alarm goes off. Such people are called good 'timers' of their experiences. Presumably, this inner bodily rhythm, elastic though it may be and subject to change, is co-ordinated with all motor activities, such as walking, and

even with some that are not motor, such as concentrating on a passage of verse read aloud.

Now it has been proposed, in the experimental study of English prose rhythms, that literary distinctions may be based on the degree of co-ordination of the bodily rhythm (the 'unitary pulse') with the auditory rhythms formed by accented and unaccented syllables of words. The co-ordination is best observed, of course, in passages actually heard with the ears (as we have been insisting), not as they may be imagined to sound from the abstract symbols on a printed page. Even in silent reading, however, the very arrangement of words on a page will affect one's efforts to co-ordinate speech units with the periods of the bodily pulse. If the beats of the bodily pulse correspond at fairly regular intervals with the stresses of the words printed on a page, we have verse. There are marginal cases, of course, and, moreover, not all verse is regarded as poetry, for many factors are required for the latter besides rhythmical beat; but the correspondence in beats may be taken as furnishing the material, physiological foundation to verse.

The co-ordination is most easily made when the listener is also the declaimer: that is, when someone reads aloud to himself. Here the tempo of articulation will unconsciously be closely synchronized with the individual's normal unitary beat. If this is not so initially, a slight adjustment of the unitary pulse, the tempo of reading, etc., will bring the moments of co-ordination into regular periodicity, though the intervals between such moments may remain rather widely spaced. A peak of the one curve can be made to coincide with a peak of the other quite regularly.



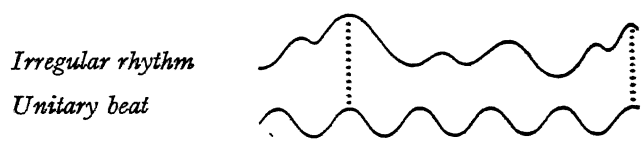
Transitory deviations from either of the two regular patterns of coincidence are readily compensated by hurrying or retarding

the limited section concerned. When the deviations are rare, they do not affect one's interpretation of discourse as regular verse. As they increase in number, it may still be possible to keep the attention fixed on the predominating series of regular coincidences.

In typical prose, on the other hand, the coincidences of word accent and of physiological pulse occur in a random manner, with a great predominance of syncopated points where the one occurs without the other. It is important to remember that even here, on the level of physical timing, such matters as the words chosen (exalted versus ordinary vocabulary), meaning, style, and the very arrangement on a printed page, will affect one's attitude to what is being read; thus we respond to it either by heightening an inclination to rhythmical delivery (if we are convinced that this is intended) or by reducing it (in the opposite case).

In this way the role of listener or reader is also creative, to a degree; the author's art may be frustrated by the withholding of that creative participation. So little can even the mechanically measurable aspects of any art be separated from the nature and appeal of its content to an audience.

We may visualize the peaks of typical prose thus in relation to the body's regular unitary beat:



Free verse has been defined as a jumping back and forth from regular coincidence of beats to predominant non-coincidence or syncopation. The coincidences are emphasized at times by similar grammatical constructions.

Rhythmical prose does the same thing, essentially, but it reduces the regularity of coincidence still further and employs a correspondingly less exalted style. Such prose tends to use com-

pletely random stresses, as in ordinary prose, except at certain conspicuous points in the sentence and paragraphs. Rhythmical prose has always tended to centre its patterned effects at the ends of sentences, since these are the parts that echo longest in a listener's memory and thus win a special kind of attention from him. Within the sentences, phrases at the ends of important divisions (clauses, periods, or *cola*, as they have been called) also enjoy a certain emphasis. Both ancient orators and mediaeval writers and preachers were aware of this. They worked out rhythmical patterns pleasing to the ear in end-sentence and end-clause position. The term for these patterns was the Latin word *cursus*, of which several types were recognized. The trained listener, after a certain number of syncopated phrases with merely haphazard coincidences, learnt to expect regular, final auditory pulses in the concluding ones, and to this recurrence he learnt to adjust his ear with aesthetic pleasure. Readers learnt the same sort of adjustment of their expectations in certain kinds of prose composition. An entire passage of rhythmical prose might be further stylized by carefully balanced constructions, by alliteration, assonance, and many of the other ornaments typical of verse.

Modern writers who cultivate prose rhythm for lyrical effects do very much the same thing. Whether by intuition or erudition they recognize that patterned *conclusions* to sentences—technically called 'cadences'—will give a pervasive effect to entire passages. Cadenced prose in English often employs a spurt of one or two paeons or dactyls (giving an effect of speed), followed by one or two conspicuous, strong stresses in a slower conclusion. Phrases with feminine endings are less characteristic of English than of Latin. Here are some of the cadences most often used in English:

' x x '
' x x x ' (more rarely, ' x x x x ')
' x x ' x x' '
' x x ' x
' x x x ' x

Such cadences, and a few others, have been identified in the prose of Sir Thomas Browne (seventeenth century) and the English Book of Common Prayer, with such frequency that their presence can scarcely be the result of accident. Even earlier, the English prose of the fourteenth century (Chaucer's and that of some of his contemporaries) shows efforts to apply a conscious doctrine of rhythm to prose.

The kinship with modern cadenced prose may be made clear by some examples. Sir Thomas Browne, dealing with dignified subjects in a style frequently lyrical, used not only cadenced endings but also strongly rhythmical effects throughout his entire sentences, with a variety of patterns:

We cannot hope to live so long in our names	' x x '
as some have done in their persons. . . .	' x x ' x
To extend our memories by monuments,	(2 dactyls)
whose death we daily pray for,	(iambic–trochaic)
and whose duration we cannot hope	' x x x '
without injury to our expectations	(trochaic)
in the advent of the last day,	' x x x ' '
were a contradiction to our beliefs.	' x x x x '

This may be compared with the lyrical descriptions in *Men, Women and Boats* by the American prose writer Stephen Crane, where the same cadences appear. T. S. Eliot's 'Hysteria' is an experiment in rhythmical prose on a deliberately vulgar (*not* exalted) level, heightening the baldly unlyrical contents by rhythmical *cola*. The conclusion is:

'If the lady and gentleman wish to take their tea in the garden'	' x x ' x
[the same line repeated]	' x x ' x
I decided that if the shaking of her breasts could be stopped	' x x '
Some of the fragments of the afternoon could be collected	' x x x ' x
And I concentrated my attention	' x ' x x x ' x
with careful subtlety to this end.	' x x x ' '

James Joyce gets his cadences by using a number of these patterns finally, some of them being placed just before a concluding iamb or trochee:

Yes, the newspapers were right:	' ' x x '
snow was general all over Ireland.	' x x ' x
It was falling	(2 trochees)
on every part of the dark central plain,	' x x ' ' x '
on the treeless hills,	(cretic)
falling softly upon the Bog of Allen	(2 trochees)
and, farther westward,	(2 trochees)
falling softly	(2 trochees)
into the dark mutinous Shannon waves.	' ' x x ' x '
It was falling, too,	(cretic)
upon the very part of the churchyard on the hill	' x x x '
where Michael Furey lay buried.	' x x ' x

Here, as in other prose passages, there may be difference of opinion concerning the subdivision of sentences into *cola*, but the rhythmical effect of the whole is unmistakable. It is heightened by verbal repetition, by a parallelism of grammatical structure, and in all parts of the sentences by an artful contrasting of rapid with slow rhythmical units, as when the acceleration of 'falling on every part of the . . .' is compensated by the slowness of 'dark central plain'. The colloquial tone of the opening phrase serves by its prosaicness to restrain us from too great an effort at formal regularity. Otherwise we should be tempted to adapt the whole paragraph to regular verse scansion, by minor adjustment in timing to avoid syncopation. As it is, the total effect is as close to verse as one can expect to find in a passage that the author has taken care to announce as prose.

In addition, Joyce has heightened the musical quality of these lines by the preponderance of certain vowel sounds, [ɔ], [ɑ] in *falling, softly, dark, part*, etc., and [ju], [u] in *mutinous, Furey, too*. This raises a final question in relation to sound effects, one that has hitherto been deferred. Apart from elementary imitations and symbolisms—discussed in the preceding chapter—is there any purely physical basis, as in music, for

preferring certain sounds in close proximity with others, as we prefer certain combinations of frequencies in the notes used to build up the traditional harmonious chords?

Pitch is an aspect of music that at first glance would not appear to enter into spoken verse at all. Any syllable can, of course, be sung on any note within the range of the human voice. Singing involves a control of the vocal cords so as to make them vibrate at will according to the frequency of any note in the scale. It is done regardless of what vowel is being enunciated at the time. As with the strings of musical instruments, the vocal cords are so adjusted that the vibrating unit oscillates as a whole for a given number of times per second. The greater the frequency of vibration, the higher the pitch of the fundamental tone produced. When we speak, we do not exercise this control so carefully as in singing. There are sentence melodies of a sort in every language, called intonations, but they have a more limited range and are far less sharply defined than are sung melodies.

Speech sounds, whether sung or spoken, differ from those of a violin in an important manner. The resonating body of a violin is a fixed one of unchanging size and shape. Not so the complex mechanism of the human mouth, nose, and throat. Jaws, tongue, teeth, velum (soft palate), nasal and oral cavities, are brought into use in varoius ways for the separate vowel sounds, and assume various positions as we speak or sing. The modified shapes and dimensions intensify certain subsidiary tones accompanying the fundamental one being enunciated. These are called overtones. They are related to the fundamental tone in so far as the vibrations per second of the overtones have definite arithmetical relations to the numbers of vibrations of the fundamental. That is, the overtones may have frequencies 2, $2\frac{1}{2}$, 3, 4 . . . etc. times as great as the fundamental one, regardless of what this latter may be. It is not a question of absolute but of relative effects.

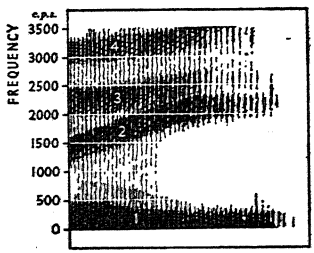
A listener's ear detects those overtones in a given vowel that

are emphasized by the physical arrangement of speech organs for that vowel. They are what enable him to identify the vowel; they give it what is vaguely known as its 'colour'. While absolute values vary, the relative ones (that is, the proportional relations to the fundamental) remain fairly constant. These underlie as physical basis any attempt to distinguish some sounds or combinations of them as more pleasing than others.[4]

Let us take an example. If you happen to pronounce a vowel [i] at a frequency of 500 vibrations per second—which is close to the 'tempered' frequency (517) of an octave above middle C on the painoforte—the characteristic strengthened overtones due to the physical contours of the mouth when producing this particular sound, cluster about 2,000 and 3,000 vibrations per second. These are the overtones that we perceive aurally when we identify the vowel. The proportion is 1: 4: 6. The same proportion would be maintained, no matter what was the fundamental tone on which the sound was made. Surprisingly little variation is observed in the relative effects according to whether the speaker is a man or woman, or is talking at a high or low general range of pitch, or is using a rising or falling inflection in the sentence melody (as for questions or answers respectively). If the vowel is [a], the characteristic overtones are made with fewer vibrations than for [i], and the ear detects a lower *relative* pitch in comparison with whatever the fundamental one may be. In a diphthong, there is a change of characteristic overtones within a single syllable.

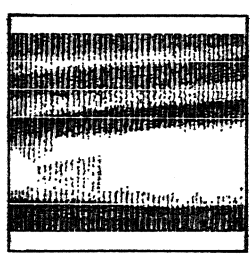
By electronic devices it is possible to record an image of fundamental frequencies in relation to the two or three most conspicuous overtones possessed by the various vowels. Some consonants, especially [l, r, j, w], for instance, likewise produce images almost as clear as the vowels, while others like the unvoiced explosives [p, t, k] appear rather as interruptions in the recorded stream of vibrations. The instrument thus recording 'visible speech' is called the spectrograph.[5] Darkened bands called 'hubs' show the relative positions of a fundamental and

its overtones according to a mounting range of frequencies, the lowest being at the bottom of the band. In each case it is found that the second band—that is, the one marking the first overtone—is the one that reflects the characteristic tonal effect of each vowel on the record.



Schematic adaptation of the bands for the vowel [i:]*

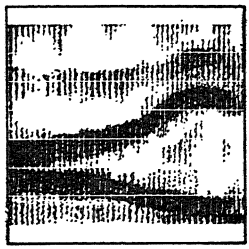
All of this is important for the practical study of the aesthetics of verse. It gives us the material foundation for a discussion of poetic effects due to the medium of sound. A glance at one of the recordings shows concretely what is meant by monotony and diversity in the sounds of verse. If you put in sequence a number of vowels and near-vowels (like j, w) with uniformly high frequencies for the second band or 'hub', the picture is something like this:



Bands for the diphthong [eɪ]*

* The diagrams are based on those in *Visible Speech*, by Ralph K. Potter, George A. Kopp, and Harriet C. Green. Copyright 1947, D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc.

On the other hand, a wide variety of frequencies for the second band is recorded in a picture like this:



[aɪ] as in *my* *

[ɔɪ] as in *boy* *

Thus we have a visual control on our naïve impressions of sound-effects in verse. Such line patterns have actually been reduced to a convenient acoustic shorthand, which deaf persons learn to read back as spoken English.

We can go a step further in the interests of poetic theory. Since the patterns are so constant, we can tentatively inquire which vowels give the greatest effect of harmony when placed in juxtaposition. If a less conspicuous band of one vowel has approximately the same recorded position (that is, the same frequency of vibration) as the main one of the vowel immediately following it, the relationship may be said to be harmonic. The overtone of the first becomes the fundamental of the second. Our experience with music causes us to find pleasure in this combination, since we tend to recognize as harmonious the relations based on such simple arithmetical proportions. The vowels [i] and [u], represented in the name *Louise,* are shown to be so related. (Earlier experimentation had already pointed to such relationship before the spectrograph was developed.) Diphthongs using vowels not too close together in pitch afford clear contrasts and are apt to yield harmonic relations within themselves, as do [ɔɪ] and [aɪ]. Diphthongs with two vowels closer

* The diagrams are based on those in *Visible Speech,* by Ralph K. Potter, George A. Kopp, and Harriet C. Green. Copyright 1947, D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc.

together, such as [eɪ], afford less clear contrasts and hence less obvious harmonics.

The following is an attempt to indicate approximately the relative tone levels of the vowels:

[u] 2	[ə] 6	[i] 26
[o] 2	[ɑ] 8	[ɪu] 24, 2
[ʊ] 4	[æ] 18	[ɔɪ] 6, 24
[ə:] 4	[ɛ] 21	[əɪ] 10, 24
[ɔ] 6	[e] 22	[eɪ] 22, 24
[ʌ] 6	[ɪ] 24	

It will be observed that some vowel sounds have neat arithmetical relations with others: e.g. [ɔ] and [ɪ] are related as 6: 24 or one to four. Others are too close to make such simple fractional relations: e.g. [æ] is to [ɛ] as 18 is to 21.

It is found, as might be expected, that neighbouring sounds affect a vowel's relative pitch. For instance, [f, v, p, b, m, l] tend to lower vowels near them; [t, d, n, z] raise vowels somewhat, while the palatals [s, ʃ, ʒ, j,] raise them considerably. The above table claims to register nothing more than very approximate relative values.

Some experimental lines of verse will show how use may deliberately be made of some of the relationships here suggested to gain harmonic effects. The subject is 'The Voice of the Flute'; the extreme contrast between the sounds of [i] and [u] is exploited to heighten an effect of skipping lightness:

Through reeds within the licker's tooth
Each Lilliputian tubal bead
Leaps with a clear and silvery speed
In a series of floo-ees, floo-ees.
These, pursuing, plead to you and me,
To both the old and youth:
Who will flee with me? Whoo— You?
Who will dance to these cool toots,
Who will stoop and leap in tune,
Who will, please? Whoo— You?

Who—He? Whoo—She? Who—You?
Who will swoop and move?
Who will coast and flit, loop and leap?
In hoops and rings on peaks of toes?
Who—You, Whoo—He, Whoo—She?
Who'll be tickled with a queer kinked tune
Ballooning through the atmosphere's blue rooms,
Fleeing in etherial altitudes? . . .

Ernest Robson

A poet may not always desire to obtain effects from vowels so juxtaposed as to be conventionally pleasing to us, in accordance with our musical auditory habits. Harshness, lack of clear contrast, deliberate monotony, and the like may be required by certain themes, as dissonance is at times required in musical composition. Co-ordination of physical effects with themes is one part—though not necessarily the most important part—of the task of poetic expression. Recognition of it may also be part of the critic's task, and of the listener's pleasure.

General acoustic prominence. All of the physical aspects of language sounds—intensity, duration, pitch, harmonic relations—contribute to a total effect of greater or less acoustic prominence. It is this complex of factors which produces the quasi-music of verse, not the single crude element of stress as handled in old fashioned metrics. With the information here presented, one may re-analyse the exercises in scansion given in ordinary handbooks to discover what concomitant values enrich the simple patterns of stress. It may be found useful to apply spectrographic analysis of the sound sequences of verse, by means of the acoustic shorthand worked out in connection with the physical research, in order to obtain a simple and graphic image of the values involved. Details are given in the work on the spectrograph recordings of visible speech, published by the Bell Laboratories.[5]

Perhaps a brief warning will not be out of place at this point, however. Enthusiastic experimenters with the verse medium,

those who concern themselves primarily with the external forms assumed by it, may be tempted to suppose that increased knowledge of its physical basis will automatically solve problems that actually belong in the area of meaning and ideology. Acoustic effects are, of course, a surface phenomenon in poetry. They are very important, and may be vitally connected with the subject matter, but if they are made too prominent and engage the attention too urgently they frustrate the purposes of communication, and lead to a cult of technique It is thus that sound effects are used by some formalistic writers today, at the expense of communicable meaning.

On the other hand, any art can and should benefit from increased knowledge in the sciences and technologies related to its medium. The new knowledge placed by physics at the disposal of versification reminds us afresh of the importance of the ear as the sense instrument of poetical enjoyment. Even the most rarefied expressions of the Muses' language have a material physical basis, and a surer mastery of that basis is one element in successful expression. Perhaps modern English and American poets—once they attain a social position enabling them to recapture the audiences of which they have been robbed—will be able to employ acoustical knowledge in the service of appropriate and worthy themes. Meantime, it may aid those who master it now to achieve a new clarity and competence in handling standards of judgment on the merits of contemporary verse.

CHAPTER VII: NOTES

1. The term *accent* is used in speaking of separate words as they appear isolated in a dictionary; *stress*, for phrases in verse or prose discourse.

2. See Ada Snell in *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, XXXIV, 1919. Duration in time has been used as a chief basis for analysing English metrics by those who are most impressed with the analogies of verse to music. The unit taken is the time length of the unstressed syllable, called a *mora*. A stressed syllable is assumed to have twice this value, usually. The relation is compared to that between a quarter note and an eighth, or a dotted quarter to a sixteenth. Pauses

are rests of one or two *morae*. For an account of such a system, see D. S. MacColl, 'Rhythm in English Verse, Prose and Speech.' *Essays and Studies of the English Association*, V, Oxford, 1914, pp. 7–50. Scansion in *morae*, however, ignores many important factors.

3. In prose we also tend to shift the stresses of certain words, secondary though they may be, to make them conform to a conspicuous sentence rhythm. Thus with the word *into*: 'She divíded the cáke into fíve for them' (dactyllic); 'I toók the chíld intò the hóuse' (iambic); 'He léd me ìnto thís' (trochaic). Compare also 'It was an únfoùnded charge' with 'The chárge was unfóunded'.

4. Effects of pleasingness depend on the selection of certain arithmetical relations between the fundamentals and their overtones in the same or neighbouring sounds. Choice of preferred effects in speech as in music is not the same in all cultures. There are variations in the standards among different peoples as to what is 'harmonious'. Ultimate causes for the differing attitudes are no doubt of sociological origin, but their nature is obscure. The present discussion is based on the preferences arising from European habits and training in listening to music and speech. A slightly different, but equally interesting discussion could be based on auditory preferences in other cultures such as those of Africa and the Orient (e.g. China).

5. Described by Ralph Potter and others in *Visible Speech*, New York: Van Nostrand, 1947, published for the Bell Telephone Laboratories. A recording of speech is made on a magnetic tape. As it is replayed successive times, tuned electrical circuits cause a stylus to pick out and record, one above another, the component frequencies contained in the complex waves of speech sounds. Bands of dark tracing on the record show the characteristic overtones in varying positions for individual speech sounds. 'Voice quality may change the appearance of the resonance bars, but it does not tend to alter their relative positions or hubs. For these reasons differences between male and female voices do not greatly change the patterns. It does not matter whether the speaker be a tenor, bass, soprano, or contralto. The relative hubs of the sounds are not changed enough by the pitch or the quality of voice to cause difficulty in reading', p. 45. See further Pierre Delattre and others, 'An Experimental Study of the Acoustic Determinants of Vowel Colour', *Word*, Vol. VIII, 1952, pp. 195–210. My thanks are due to Mr. Ernest Robson of New York for calling my attention to the aesthetic implications in these acoustic studies.

Appendices

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

absolute sentence construction: a cluster of words not modifying any specific part of a sentence, but having an independent status within it.

accent: the application of conspicuous effort to the pronunciation of a syllable in a given word, making it stand out more clearly than adjacent syllables. The effort involves such factors as duration, dynamics, and pitch of the sound.

activity transfer: in figurative language, a description of one type of functioning in terms of another, as when we say, 'He *sailed through* his work on the experiment.'

alliteration: repetition of initial consonants or consonant clusters at the beginning of words, as in *blind, blank.*

alliterative assonance: coincidence of both the initial consonant and the vowel elements in two or more syllables, as in *save, sail.*

amphibrach: a foot of one stressed syllable with a single unstressed one preceding and another following: x ′ x.

anacrusis: an unstressed beginning of one or more syllables prefixed to a line of verse that would normally begin with a stress.

anapaest: a metrical foot of three syllables, the first two being unstressed and the third stressed: x x ′.

antistrophe: see ode.

assonance: coincidence of vowel sounds only in two or more syllables, as in *lame, take.*

ballad: a simple popular form of verse narrative, very frequently in four-line stanzas, with the fourth line (sometimes the second also) repeated in identical or nearly identical form throughout. The first and third lines usually contain four feet; the second and fourth, three. See refrain.

ballade: an elaborate type of poem, French in origin, consisting of three stanzas of limited rhyme-scheme (the same rhymes in all stanzas), followed by an *envoy* or stanza of dedication (usually to a patron).

bard: a professional poet. The term is derived from the Celtic languages, and was originally applied to the honoured composers and reciters of verse among the early Welsh, Irish, and Scotch-Gaelic tribes in pre-feudal society.

blank verse: unrhymed iambic pentameter verse, characterized by frequent run-on lines. See *enjambment.*

broadside: a single sheet of print. Popular poems were distributed in this form during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

bylina: a popular epic narrative in Russian, dealing with legendary and historical personages from the tenth to the seventeenth centuries. *Byliny* were chanted to musical accompaniment.

cadence: a rhythmically patterned conclusion to a prose clause or sentence. The types of rhythmical pattern are called *cursus*, q.v.

caesura: a pause or break in a line of verse, usually approximately at the mid-point.

choriamb: a combination of a trochee and an iamb in a single metrical foot: ′ x x ′.

colon (pl. *cola*)*:* a subdivision of a sentence marked by a pause. In rhythmical prose, the conclusion or cadence of a colon often has a marked pattern of stresses.

conceit: an elaborate metaphor based upon a quaint or far-fetched comparison.

consonance: the agreement of both consonant elements in two or more syllables, as in *look, lake.*

consonant: a speech sound produced by a closure of the breath channel and consequent friction of the escaping air, as in the pronunciation of *p, k, s, g.* Consonants are contrasted with vowels, q.v., which are formed without such closure.

couplet: a pair of verse lines, usually linked by rhyme.

cretic: a metrical foot of two stressed syllables separated by one unstressed: ′ x ′.

cursus: a specific rhythmical pattern appearing in prose discourse at the end of a clause or sentence. In English, the cursus is sometimes predominantly iambic or trochaic, or it resembles those of Latin rhythmical prose, using such patterns as ′ x x ′ x, x′ x x x ′ x, and the choriamb ′ x x ′.

dactyl: a metrical foot of three syllables, a stressed one followed by two unstressed: ′ x x.

diphthong: a combination of two vowels in one syllable, as in the pronunciation of *eye* [ai].

dipody: a metrical unit of two feet.

doggerel verse: irregular and loosely constructed long lines such as have been employed in popular satires and burlesques. Doggerel verse at times permits stress to fall on normally unaccented words or syllables.

duration of sound: the length of time during which a given sound persists, measured in regular units such as tenths of seconds.

dynamics: factors of force in utterance that cause spoken syllables to have varying degrees of conspicuousness in relation to neighbouring syllables.

ellipsis: omission of a sentence part; in normal practice, the part omitted can readily be supplied from context.

end rhyme: the occurrence of rhyme at the ends of lines of verse.

enjambment: the running over of sentences from one line of verse to another so that the ends of lines do not coincide with pauses in or between sentences.

epic: a narrative poem written in exalted style, typically dealing with heroic personages.

epithalamium: a marriage song dedicated to the bride and groom.

étude: in any of the arts, an exercise for the development of some specific technique. Études in music, painting, poetry, etc., can be creations of artistic value in themselves, e.g. those written by Chopin for the pianoforte.

eye rhyme: two or more words that, according to orthography, suggest normal rhyme but do not actually fulfil its requirements as pronounced, e.g. *cough, bough.*

feminine rhyme: a double rhyme of words in which the last, unaccented syllables are identical and the penultimate syllables form regular rhymes, as *creature, feature.*

foot in metrics: a group of syllables forming a unit in verse. The arrangement of stressed syllables in a foot forms a pattern that is regularly repeated throughout the line.

formalism: in the arts, the practice of developing technical forms and principles at the expense of content.

free verse: an arrangement of verse lines of irregular length, having relatively free patterns of stress, but frequently marked off into units with recurrent patterns by means of devices such as repetition, parallel grammatical structure, etc. Cadence, q.v., is employed rather than formally scanned feet.

frequency: see vowel frequency.

fundamental tone: the sound given by the lowest frequency of vibration (the principal component) in a complex musical tone.

harmonics: the science of musical sounds; specifically, of the relation of overtones, q.v., to fundamental tones, q.v.

hemistich: a half-line of verse.

hendecasyllabics: lines of eleven syllables. A feminine rhyme at the end of an iambic pentameter will change it into a hendecasyllabic line.

heroic couplet: rhyming pairs of iambic pentameter lines, normally end-stopped and forming separate units of discourse.

hexameter line: a verse unit of six feet. The English hexameter often uses dactyls throughout, but classical verse combined dactyls with spondees.

hovering stress: accent of a word capable of being shifted under compulsion of the verse rhythm, as in the varying pronunciation of *'oblate, ob'late.*

iamb: a metrical foot consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one: x ′.

ictus: the rhythmical stress in verse or prose discourse.

identical rhyme: the pairing of identical syllables for rhyme effect, as when homonyms are used (*heart : hart*) or the same word is repeated (*heart : heart*). Sometimes called *rhyme riche.*

ideology: a socially conditioned manner of thinking on a theoretical level.

inner or *interior rhyme:* the use of rhyme effects within a line of verse. This may supplement or replace the end rhyme.

intertwined statements: the combination of two or more independent statements in such a way that the discourse moves back and forth from one to the other without subordination of either.

inverted sentence order: the placing of predicate or complement, or both, at the head of an English sentence, in the position normally occupied by the subject.

juxtaposition: the device, in poetry, of placing elements (words, images, etc.) side by side in unusual combinations.

laureate: literally, crowned with laurels; a term applied in England to a poet officially appointed by the sovereign and expected to produce poems for state occasions.

lyric: a type of shorter verse composition, usually in stanzas, in which the subjective affective element (the poet's feelings or personal point of view) is a predominant factor.

Maecenas: a patron of poets; so named from the wealthy and aristocratic Roman who befriended Horace and Virgil.

metaphor: a figure of speech in which words or phrases literally describing one object are transferred to others in order to indicate a likeness between them.

metaphysical poetry: a school of verse writing of the seventeenth century that made extensive use of subtle and far-fetched ideas and expressions, treating emotional themes (love and mystical religion) in a conspicuously intellectual way. The term originated with Samuel Johnson.

meter: the measured and systematically arranged rhythm of verse, usually as disposed in feet.

metrics: the system of arrangement of metres; the study or analysis of that system.

mock epic: a poem ostensibly in epic style, but containing strong elements of burlesque; frequently used as satire.

molossus: three stressed syllables constituting a metrical foot: ′ ′ ′ .

nasals: consonants made by the expulsion of breath through the nose: [m], [n], and [ŋ].

near-rhyme: the agreement of final consonant elements alone in two or more syllables, as in *rocks, wax.*

normal sentence order: in English, this is the sequence *actor* → *action* → *receiver* or *complement* (if any); in grammatical terms, *subject* → *predicate* → (*object* or *complement*).

octave (*octet*) *of a sonnet:* the first eight lines in a sonnet of the Italian style. It is composed of three quatrains rhyming *abba.* See sestet.

octosyllabic line: one having eight syllables. In English and French verse, this has traditionally been an iambic line. Octosyllabic couplets were widely used for narratives in both languages during the Middle Ages.

ode: a lyrical song of dignified style, appropriate for singing or formal declamation. The form is of Greek origin. The sections of the poem are divided into two stanzas of identical structure called strophe and antistrophe respectively, followed by an epode of contrasting form. In English, the term is more loosely applied to any type of dignified lyric with uniform stanzas.

onomatopoeia: the formation of words in imitation of the sounds of nature, as in *sizzle, buzz,* etc. In poetics, onomatopoeia is applied to the use of such words for literary effect.

overtone: one of the higher tones that, combined with the fundamental, make up a complex musical tone.

paeon: a foot of four syllables containing but one stress which may occur in any one of four positions: ′ x x x, or x ′ x x, or x x ′ x, or x x x ′.

parallel syntactic constructions: a series of sentence elements having precisely the same grammatical function, such as parallel clauses, etc., modifying the same word or words.

pathetic fallacy: the attribution of human feelings to nature. The term is usually applied to relatively unsuccessful instances of this poetic usage.

pentameter verse: lines of five feet; in English, typically iambic.

periodic sentence: one that delays the appearance of essential syntactic elements and important ideas until the end, or a position near the end.

pitch: that quality of a musical tone which is determined by the frequency of sound vibrations striking the ear.

poetics: the theory of poetry; the systematic study of its structure.

presentation: in grammar, a verbless sentence that nevertheless is accepted as a complete statement.

prosody: the study of metrical structures and sound effects in verse, including such subjects as types of foot, incidence of pauses, rhyme.

pun: a play on words having the same or nearly the same sounds, but different meanings.

quatrain: a stanza of four lines.

refrain: a phrase or verse line occurring regularly throughout a poem, usually at the ends of stanzas.

rhyme (simple): the occurrence of identical vowel sounds and identical final consonants in two or more syllables, as in *gave, lave.*

rhyme royal: a stanza of seven lines in iambic pentameter verse, rhyming *ababbcc.* Though originated by Chaucer, the form is so named because it was used by King James of Scotland (early fifteenth century) in composing *The Kingis Quair.*

rhythm: the regular recurrence of conspicuous syllables in spoken language, alternating with relatively inconspicuous ones. Conspicuousness is determined by factors of pitch, dynamics, and duration.

rhythmical prose: discourse that avoids the regular metrical effects of verse, but shows marked rhythmical patterns at irregular intervals, especially at sentence *cola,* q.v.

scansion: the act of distinguishing metrical units in verse.

scop: an Anglo-Saxon poet in pre-Conquest England, usually attached to the court of a local king.

semantic rejuvenation: a use of words with a revived sense of their etymological origins and the primary meanings of their component parts.

sense transfer: in figurative language, a description of one type of sense experience in terms of another.

sestet: in a sonnet of the Italian type, the concluding six lines, composed of two groups of three lines each, using two or three rhymes.

shift of grammatical category: the transfer of a word from the function of one part of speech to another, as when *table,* normally a noun, is used as a verb in 'to *table* the resolution'.

sibilants: consonants made with hissing sounds, as [s] and [z].

skald: a Scandinavian poet of the pre-feudal age, usually attached to the court of a local king. Skaldic verse, elaborated by these poets, was

marked by extremely intricate word order and patterned sound effects (alliteration sometimes combined with rhyme).

sonnet: a lyrical verse form of fourteen lines, generally in iambic pentameter verse, appropriate for the treatment of a unified idea or a single emotion.

sonnet, English: a modification of the original Italian form, using three quatrains followed by a couplet. The rhyme scheme is *abab, cdcd, efef, gg.*

sonnet, Italian: as developed by Petrarch (fourteenth century), the form had an octave of two quatrains, followed by a sestet of two groups of three lines (tercets).

sonnet sequence: a series of sonnets, traditionally about a hundred in number, dealing with a more or less unified theme.

sound symbolism: a correlation of spoken sound effects with the ideas expressed by them. The basis for sound symbolism is partly a physical likeness between the sounds of nature and those of speech (see onomatopoeia) and partly a more arbitrary subjective association of sounds with images from experience.

spectrograph: an electronic device that makes a visual record of the relative frequencies of characteristic tones and overtones of spoken sounds.

Spenserian stanza: a verse form of nine lines used by Edmund Spenser (sixteenth century) in the *Faerie Queen,* consisting of eight iambic pentameters followed by an alexandrine, or six-stress line. The rhyme scheme is *ababbcbcc.*

spiritual: a type of song developed by Negroes in the Southern part of the United States under conditions of slavery. It was marked by strong rhythms, and it used verse forms resembling those of the popular ballad. The contents were frequently of a religious nature, used to express aspirations towards freedom and concealed protests against slavery.

spondee: a metrical foot of two stressed syllables: ′ ′.

sprung rhythm: a succession of feet of various kinds within the same line, having strong stress at the onset of each foot, so that although the pattern changes and several types of metre are heard in such close proximity as to be apprehended simultaneously, the demarcations between patterns are still clearly perceptible.

stanza: a recurring unit of verses in a poem, with the lines arranged according to some formal scheme of rhyme and scansion.

stress: the quality of conspicuousness in certain syllables, due to the force of utterance, to pitch, duration, etc., as it is employed in regular patterns in verse composition.

strong verbs: in the Germanic languages, verbs which indicate change

of tense by internal vowel change, as *sing, sang*. In poetics, these are regarded as examples of consonance, q.v.

strophe: see ode.

surrealism: a style of modern art purporting to express 'subconscious' mental processes, as in a dream state, by startling juxtapositions that are foreign to waking experience.

syllable: one or more speech sounds pronounced with a single impulse of breath. A syllable may constitute a whole word (as in *man*), or part of a word (as in *man-date*).

symbol: an object or a conventional figure suggesting wide associations of meaning, often of an abstract character, as for instance in a pair of clasped hands—either in reality or in pictured representation —may be used as a symbol for fraternity.

symbolism: in art, the method of using objects or figures to create structures of meanings beyond the literal or physical presentation.

syncopation: the shifting of a metrical stress to an unexpected position, the failure of a main stress to fall at the beginning of a measure (or foot), which normally requires it in that position. When two types of rhythm are perceived simultaneously, the stresses of one will give an effect of syncopation in relation to those of the other.

terza rima: stanzas of three lines each, written in series with the rhyme-scheme *aba, bcb, cdc, ded,* etc. The series may be ended with a single line rhyming with the inner (second) one of the preceding stanza: *ded, e.*

tetrameter line: a line of verse consisting of four feet. A common form in English is the iambic tetrameter couplet.

transferred epithet: an adjective removed from the word it would normally modify and placed before a neighbouring substantive, as when Eve Merriam speaks (see Chapter V) of a meek clerk filing his pallid papers.

trochee: a metrical foot consisting of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed one: ′ x.

troubadour: in mediaeval France, a feudal poet attached to a noble or royal court who composed and sang lyrical verses of love (dedicated to an aristocratic lady) and war (dedicated to a patron). The patronage of troubadours began in Provence and spread thence to the north of France and to other countries.

unitary beat or pulse: a basic bodily rhythm, established by such functions as breathing and heart-beats, which permits the individual to co-ordinate a subjective sense of time with exterior rhythmical stimuli such as sound vibrations.

vers libre: see free verse.

verse: a line of poetry having a distinctive rhythmical pattern. The term is sometimes applied to rhythmical (e.g. Biblical) prose; sometimes to poetry in general as contrasted with all prose.

versification: the art or practice of writing verses; the patterns employed in such writing.

voiced consonant: one pronounced with vibration of the vocal cords as *b, d, g.* When vibrated, the cords are held in a relaxed position; hence voicing requires a relatively small amount of physical effort and produces a relatively inconspicuous sound.

voiceless consonant: one pronounced without vibration of the vocal cords, as *p, t, k.* Voiceless consonants are produced with the vocal cords drawn aside from the expelled current of air, and are more conspicuous than voiced ones in normal English speech.

vowel: a speech sound produced without blocking or narrowing of the speech channel, as *u, o.*

vowel frequency: the number of sound vibrations that produce the characteristic overtone of a given vowel. The relationship to the fundamental remains the same, regardless of the tone on which the latter is spoken or sung.

wit: in the seventeenth-century meaning, in literature, a facility in handling abstract ideas and suggesting unusual associations among them.

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